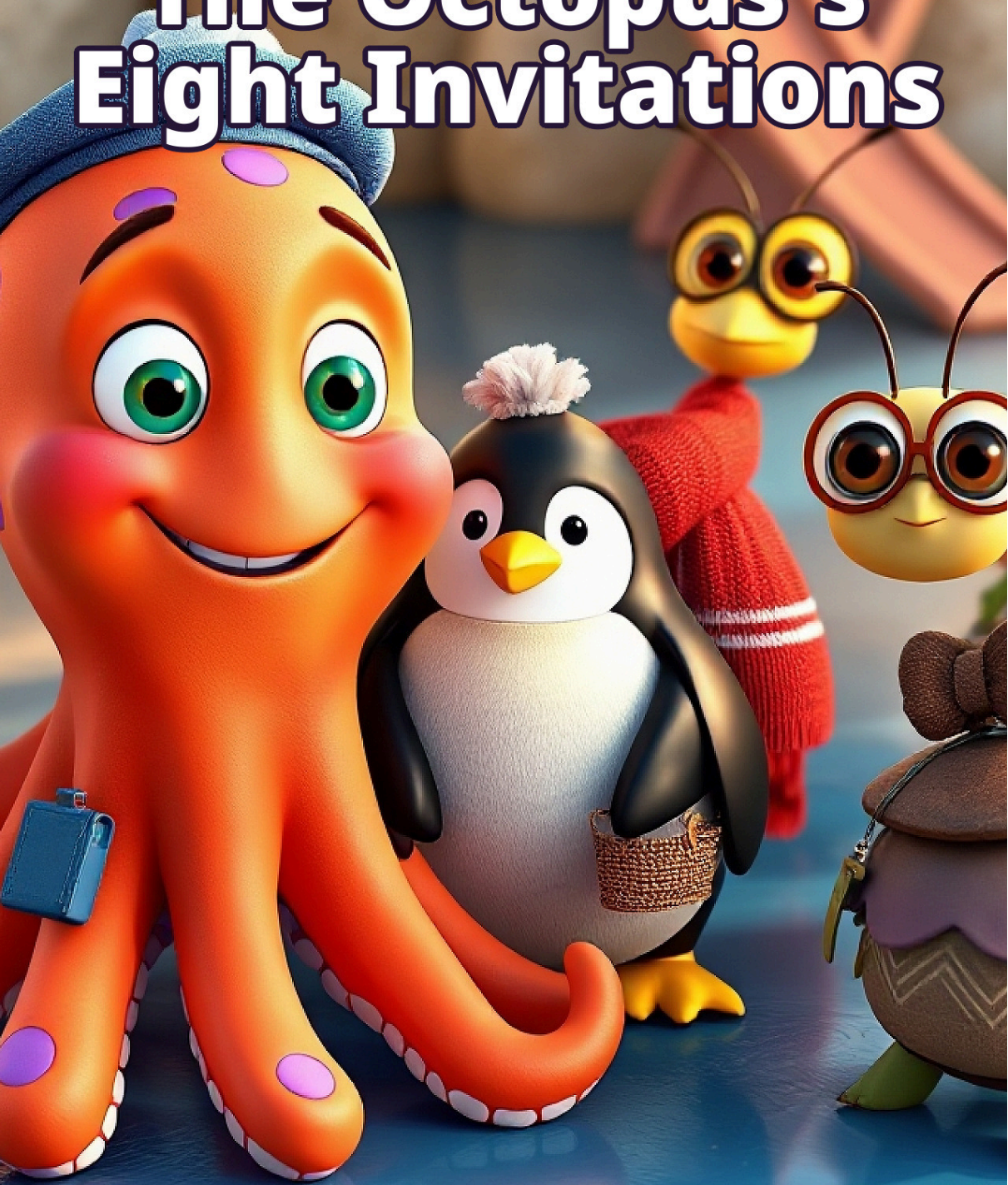


# The Octopus's Eight Invitations



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In a cozy little cove where the water glowed blue, lived Ollie the Octopus. Her coral-orange skin was covered in soft purple spots, and her eight wavy arms wiggled with excitement. She wore a tiny blue sailor hat and carried a small canvas satchel. Today, Ollie was planning something very special. "A party!" she squealed, her teal eyes sparkling bright.



Ollie pulled eight crisp invitations from her satchel. Each one was written in shiny silver ink and smelled like salt and sunshine. She had eight friends to invite, and she had eight arms to deliver them all at once! "One invitation for each arm," she giggled, wiggling her pale pink suckers. "My party will be perfect. I have planned everything!"



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Ollie had planned eight activities, one for each arm. Arm one: sliding races! Arm two: music and dancing! Arm three: painting! Arm four: reading stories! Arm five: puzzles! Arm six: flower collecting! Arm seven: shell sorting! Arm eight: cloud watching! "Every friend will do all eight activities," Ollie said firmly. "Because that is the plan!"



Pip the Penguin was the first to arrive, zooming down the sandy hill on her round white belly. Her red striped scarf flapped in the breeze, and her tiny blue earmuffs bounced. "Hooray! A party!" she chirped. But when Ollie showed her the schedule, Pip tilted her head. "Do we have to do every single thing?" asked Pip. "I really love to slide and dance!"



Beatrix the Bee buzzed in next, her lavender petal skirt swishing as she landed. She carried her tiny woven basket, already full of pollen. "Oh, what a lovely party!" she said, her green eyes wide. When Ollie read the music activity, Beatrix frowned. "Music is so loud," she whispered. "I would much rather paint quietly with my flowers. Could I choose?"



Last came Toby the Tortoise, walking slowly up the path. His round wire glasses gleamed, and his little orange bow tie sat neatly at his neck. He smiled his warm, slow smile. "What a wonderful plan!" said Toby. But when he heard about the sliding races, he shook his head. "Oh dear. Races are too fast for me. I much prefer stories and puzzles. May I pick?"



Ollie's eight arms drooped a little. Her teal eyes blinked. "But I planned everything so carefully!" she said. "Eight activities, one for each arm! If everyone does everything, then nobody misses out!" She looked at her schedule, then at her friends. Pip wanted to move. Beatrix wanted quiet. Toby wanted slow. Nobody wanted the same things at all.



Ollie tried to make them follow her plan anyway. "First, sliding races!" she announced, waving arm one. Pip cheered and zoomed off. But Beatrix hid behind a rock, and Toby sighed. "Next, music and dancing!" sang Ollie. Pip spun happily, but Beatrix covered her tiny ears. Toby sat down slowly. "This isn't fun for everyone," said Toby quietly. "I feel a bit left out."



Ollie's rosy cheeks turned even rosier. She felt a funny twist in her tummy. Her friends were not having fun. Pip bounced on her yellow feet. "I love to slide!" she said. "But Toby doesn't." Beatrix nodded. "I love to paint, but Pip finds it boring." Toby smiled gently. "We all like different things, Ollie. That's okay. But we each want to choose what we enjoy."



Ollie sat down on a smooth round pebble and thought hard. Her eight arms curled around her like a cozy blanket. "Maybe my party doesn't have to be one big plan for everyone," she said slowly. "Maybe it can be a party with choices!" She looked at her friends. "What if I set up all eight activities and you each pick what you love best?" Pip gasped. "Even the sliding races?"



Ollie jumped up, her sailor hat bouncing. "Yes! All eight activities, one for each arm!" she declared. With a happy wiggle, she set to work. She built a sandy slide with her strong arms. She hung gentle wind chimes from a rock. She set out brushes and bright flower paints. She stacked storybooks beside a soft cushion. She arranged puzzles and shells and a quiet cloud-watching log.



When everything was ready, Ollie grinned. "Choose what makes you happy!" she called. Pip zoomed straight to the slide, cheering as she zipped down. Beatrix floated to the paints and dipped her brush in lavender petals. Toby settled onto the cushion with a storybook, his glasses glinting in the sun. Everyone picked a different activity, and everyone began to smile.



Soon the cove was full of happy sounds. Pip slid and danced, her scarf flying. Beatrix painted a tiny flower portrait. Toby read slowly and solved a puzzle with a contented sigh. Then, one by one, the friends tried something new. Pip painted a wobbly rainbow. Beatrix watched a cloud shaped like a shell. Toby slid down the sandy hill twice, laughing the whole way.



Ollie watched her friends try each other's favorites. Her heart felt as warm as the sunshine above the waves. "This is the best party I ever planned," she said. "Because everyone chose what they love. And then they tried something new, too!" Pip nodded, her beak full of paint. "Choosing is the best part!" buzzed Beatrix. "We all get to be happy!" agreed Toby.



As the sun dipped low, Ollie gathered her friends in a circle. Her eight arms reached out, and everyone held on tight. "I learned something today," Ollie said softly. "A party isn't about making everyone do the same thing. It's about letting friends choose what they enjoy." Her teal eyes twinkled. "When friends choose, everyone has a wonderful time."



Pip, Beatrix, and Toby smiled at Ollie. "Thank you for the best party ever!" they cheered. Ollie hugged each friend with a gentle arm. Now she knew that eight activities, eight arms, and eight happy friends made the perfect party. And as the stars twinkled over the little cove, Ollie the Octopus wiggled her arms and smiled her tiny smile, happy that her party included choices.