**Big Al**

Andrew Clements

In the wide blue sea there was a very friendly fish named Big Al. You could not find a nicer fish.

But Big Al was also very, very, scary.

Other fish seemed to have at least one friend. Some had many. But Big Al had none.

He did not really blame the other fish.

How can he expect little fish to trust a great big fish with eyes and skin and teeth like his?

So Big Al was lonely, and cried big salty tears into the big salty sea.

But Big Al really wanted friends, so he worked at it.

First he tried wrapping himself up with seaweed. He thought it was a great disguise, but no one else did. Who wants to stop and talk to a floating plant that has big sharp teeth?

Then he thought that if he puffed himself up round, the other fish would laugh and see how clever and silly he could be.

All they saw was how BIG he could be, and they steered clear.

Very early one morning, Big Al went down to the bottom and flopped and wiggled himself into the sand until he was almost covered up.

He looked much smaller. When other fish came near, Big Al talked and joked with them and had a delightful time.

But then one scratchy little grain of sand got stuck in his gills-and he…and hehe….and he sn…and he SNEEEEEEEZED.

When the clouds of sand cleared away. All the other fish were gone.

Big Al even changed his color one day so he could look like he belonged to a school of tiny fish passing by. He bubbled along with them for a while, laughing and feeling like he was just one of the crowd.

But he was so big and clumsy that when all the tiny fish darted to the left and then quickly back to the right, Big Al just plowed straight ahead. He went bumping and thumping right into the little fish.

Before he could even say, Excuse me, they were gone, and he was all alone again, sadder than ever.