



SANTA AND THE MARS KING

By Lucrece Hudgins Beale

AP Newsfeatures



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Chapter 1

Once upon a time there lived a little boy named Tom. He was a very curious child. He always wanted to know things. He was always asking questions.

One night a strange thing happened in the town where Tom lived. A farmer was worried about a sick calf. He got out of bed and started toward the barn where the animal lay.

As the farmer, carrying a lantern, crossed his yard, a sudden breeze snuffed out the flame. At the same time a mysterious light filled the whole yard and the farmer heard a whirring sound as if a giant top were spinning.

The farmer was very frightened. He threw himself on the ground and buried his head in his arms. When finally he dared to look the light was gone, the whirring sound had stopped. All the farmer could see was a speck of light disappearing over the top of the barn.

The farmer raced into his house. He called the police and the firemen and all his neighbors and friends and relations.

‘A flying saucer!’ he screamed. ‘I’ve seen a flying saucer!’

Most everyone in the town heard about the thing one way or another and went out to the farm to hear the strange story of the farmer’s flying saucer.

Tom went too. He was just about popping with excitement. Of course he’d heard about flying saucers and read about them. But this was the first time he’d ever known someone who really had seen one.

“What could it be? What could it be?” he went around asking everybody who would listen to him.

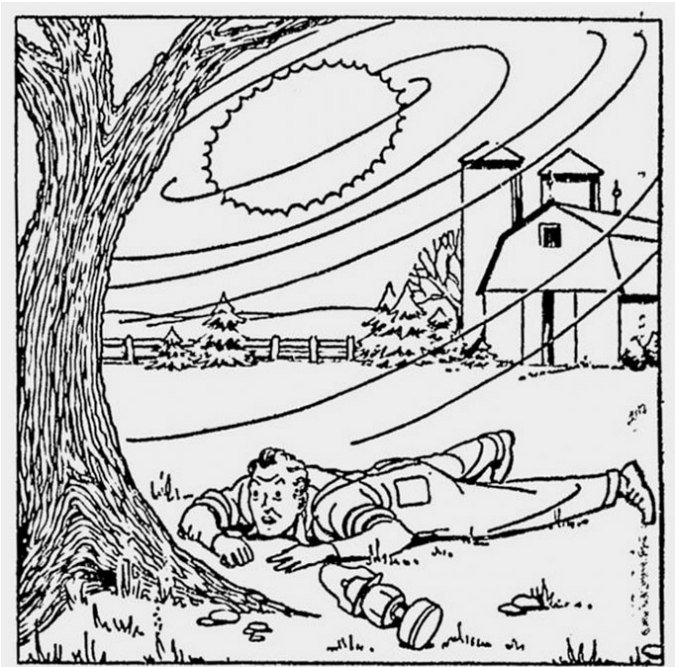
But no one had the answer. Some said it was a rocket from a foreign country. Some said it was light reflections. Some said the farmer was silly and hadn’t seen anything at all.

For three or four weeks people talked about the thing. Then, gradually, they forgot about it because they couldn’t figure out what it was.

But Tom couldn’t forget it. In fact, he thought of nothing else.

“Oh, if I’d been there,” he thought. “If I’d only seen it myself!”

He used to slip out of his house at night after everyone had gone to sleep. He would walk out to the country where the farmer lived and lie in a field and wait and wait and hope the saucer would come back.



Coloring suggestion: Barn red. Ground green. Man’s shirt and sky light blue. Man’s pants dark blue. Flying saucer yellow. Tree brown.

But it never did.

Tom had a friend. He was a smiley little elf who stood in the center of the fountain in the city park. He was made of stone and, he had posed in the fountain for many years, long before Tom was born.

Tom called the elf Handsome because he was so ugly that Tom felt sorry for him. For as long as Tom could remember he had gone to the park when he was lonely or worried. He would sit there on the steps of the fountain and tell Handsome what was on his mind.

Of course Handsome never answered. How could he? He was made of stone. But he always listened and that was the important thing.

Since the farmer’s strange sight, Tom went at least once a day to the park to tell the elf of his great curiosity about the flying saucer.

“I’ve just got to know what it was,” he would say. “I just can’t stand not knowing.” And he would recite over and over all the things it might be and all the things it couldn’t be.

This went on for a long time. And then one day the unexpected happened. Not only did Handsome listen - Handsome spoke.

“Tom,” he said, “If I wanted to know something a badly as you do, I’d find someone who flies and get the answer from him. Maybe even someone like Santa Claus.”

Chapter 2

THE AWFUL TUNNEL

When Handsome, the ugly elf, spoke right out loud for the first time in Tom's life, for the first time in history, even, why Tom just stared at him and he was speechless.

So the elf spoke again.

"If you want to find out about flying saucers why don't you go ask somebody who flies? That's what I'd do."

Tom never took his eyes off the stone statue. In fact, his eyes were nearly popping out of his head. He tried to speak but his voice came out in a little squeak and said nothing. It was as if he were the statue.

Handsome went right on talking. "Take Santa Claus. He must fly around quite a bit with those reindeer of his. Why don't you go ask him what he thinks of this flying saucer instead of sitting around here asking me every day?"

Tom gulped three times and finally he was able to speak.

"I - I didn't know you really heard me when I talked to you!"

"Good grief! Then why have you always brought your troubles to me?"

"Well, I - you - I always pretended you could hear me and that made it about the same thing."

"Exactly," said the elf. "If you pretend something long enough and hard enough pretty soon it's real."

"Oh!" whispered Tom.

"Now about this flying saucer you're so curious about. Why not ask Santa Claus?"

"B - but - I - I've never seen Santa Claus in my whole life! How could I ever find him?"

"Well," confessed the elf, "I've never seen him either but I have some friends who see quite a bit of him. They fly, too."

"Who are your friends?"

"Witches."

"Witches?"

"Of course. Haven't you heard of Halloween witches? Go ask them how to get to Santa Land."

"But, I don't know any witches," faltered Tom.

"I told you some of my best friends are witches. I'll take you to them. Wait a minute while I get out of this thing."

Suddenly, instead of one elf on the fountain there were two. They were exactly alike only one of them was made of stone and the other was a real live elf. Now the live one was climbing out of the stone one!

"It's a nuisance being cooped up in that thing," complained the live elf when at last he was free and had climbed down to where Tom sat on the fountain steps.

"Do you - do you get out of it often?" asked Tom.



Coloring suggestion: Elf's cap and suit gray, collar red. Boy's jeans blue, hair orange. Background brownish, except white door.

"Every night. This is the first time I've been out in the daytime, though. Come along now, we'll get to the witches."

He took the boy's hand and led him out of the park and through the streets of the town. Tom was dazed. "Whatever will people think?" he wondered.

But, though they passed any number of people, no one seemed to think anything at all of the fact that real live elf was walking through the town,

"He must be invisible," Tom suddenly realized. "No one except me can see him."

They walked on until they came to a large oak tree which stood right in the middle of a cemetery. The elf scratched away a piece of bark and - to Tom's amazement - there was a keyhole right in the tree! Handsome put a key in the lock and turned it. Instantly a door in the tree swung open and Tom and the elf went inside.

Narrow steps led down and down and Tom followed the elf until they came to the bottom. Then they were in a tunnel which seemed so long Tom thought it would have no end.

Cobwebs drifted against his face as he felt his way after the elf. It was a dark and frightful place.

"Just right for witches," Tom thought and he shuddered.

Suddenly a crashing noise sounded through the tunnel, like water rushing down. Tom realized with a start the elf had disappeared.

"Handsome! Handsome! Where are you?" Tom screamed and he began running madly through the tunnel.

Chapter 3

THE WITCHES FIELD

Tom stumbled through the tunnel. The crashing noise and the dark and the aloneness terrified him. He expected to find himself gobbled up by witches at every turn.

Instead, the tunnel suddenly ended. Tom found himself outdoors. There, on the bank of a purple river, stood Handsome, the elf, calmly holding the bow of a funny little orange boat.

Nearby was a waterfall. This was the cause of the crashing noise that had so frightened Tom in the tunnel.

Tom climbed in and settled on the plump cushions which covered the bottom of the boat. The boat swept away although it had neither sail nor motor to propel it through the water.

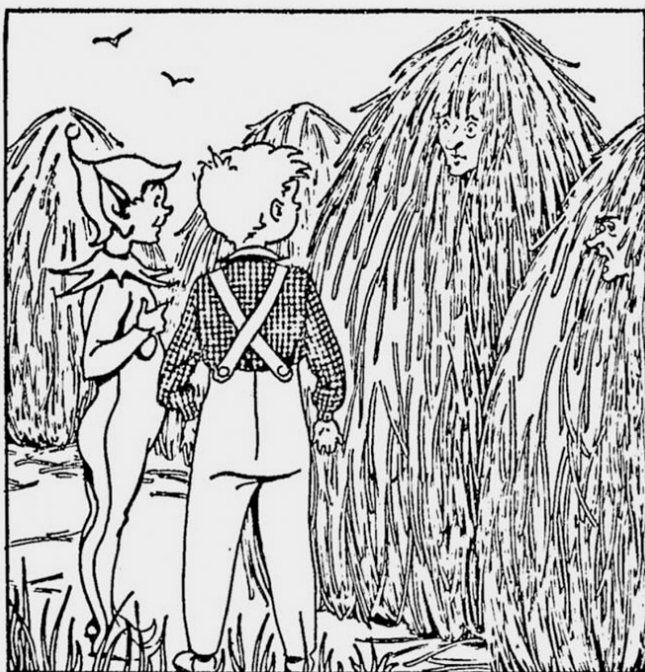
Tom had a hundred questions to ask. But before he could ask the first one the elf said, "I think I'll sleep now because I am very tired. You see I was at a dance last night. I danced with Old Mother Hubbard. A delightful creature! We danced the night away."

"Oh my!" breathed Tom. But before he could ask for more details of the dance Handsome was asleep. And before Tom could himself help he had done the same.

The little boat drifted on and on. The purple water turned to yellow, then to green and then to red. The boat moved to the shore and stopped with a joint on the edge of a big field.

The elf awoke.

"Here we are," he said, nudging Tom. "The Witches' Field." Tom jumped up. He gazed around. All he could see was the big field spotted with haystacks.



Coloring suggestion: Elf gray with red collar. Boy's hair orange, jeans blue. Haystacks yellow. Faces flesh colored.

"I don't see any witches!"

"Look again. Look three times and then tell me what you see."

So Tom looked once, twice, three times and still he could see nothing except the fields and haystacks. He was so disappointed.

"Let's go closer," said Handsome, "and look again."

The two of them got out of the boat and walked across the field. When they reached the first haystack it suddenly moved and started to sway from side to side.

Tom fell back astonished. "Why, it isn't a haystack at all!"

"Of course I'm not a haystack," said the haystack. "I'm a witch."

Sure enough it was a little old lady covered with straw! Tom looked around and saw that all the other haystacks were stirring and that they, too, were little old ladies bundled into piles of hay.

They didn't look fierce at all like Tom thought witches should look. Instead they were old and bent and wrinkled.

"Granny," said the elf to the first witch. "I've brought a friend who wants you to take him to see Santa Claus."

"Why do you want to see Santa?" Granny said sweetly.

"I wanted to ask him about flying saucers," said Tom.

Now Granny's expression changed and she looked very fierce. Her sister witches gathered around and mumbled together and shook their skinny fists. Granny turned on Tom and cried, "What do you know about flying saucers?"

Tom was frightened and in a shaky voice told about the strange thing that had upset the farmer in his town, how it was called a flying saucer although no one knew what it really was.

"And I thought," finished Tom, "that since Santa flies maybe he has seen one and can tell me what it is."

Granny drew back and chattered some more with the other witches. Then she said, "No need to go to Santa Claus. We have seen these flying saucers. If you want to know the truth they are putting us out of business. People are no longer afraid of witches. They are afraid of saucers."

"What is more they are frightening us. Why, only last night one of our witches was chased clear out of the sky by one of the things. What will happen if we can't fly anymore or frighten people on Halloween?"

Two big tears formed on Granny's eyes and rolled down the deep lines of her face. Tom felt sorry for her. But he was excited, too.

"Could you show me a flying saucer?"

"Fly with me tonight," said Granny. "I'll show you."

Chapter 4

A RIDE ON A BROOM

Tom had been looking forward to seeing Santa Claus. But, after all, the important thing was to find out about flying saucers and it looked like the witches were the ones who could help him.

Handsome, the elf, had to return to his place in the fountain at the city park. He left Tom in the care of the witches.

“Now boy,” said Granny, “You’ll have to make yourself a broom if you’re to fly with us tonight.”

“Couldn’t I use one of your old brooms?”

“We do not have old brooms. A broom flies only once and we have to make new ones for every trip. I tell you witch’s life is not an easy one. We are always hunting for the proper pieces of straw for our brooms.”

“Oh,” said Tom. “That’s why you’re all covered with straw! When I first saw you I thought you were haystacks”

“That is what we want people to think. It’s our disguise. Sometimes, when I pass a field, even I can’t tell if haystacks are really haystacks or witches working at their brooms.

“But our brooms are truly wonderful! They carry us anywhere. All we have to do is wish aloud to be someplace and oh, ho! we are there.”

Granny told Tom how to make his broom. He needed so many bent straws and so many straws with rounded ends, brown straws and yellow ones and orange ones and one of pure white. Some straws must have juice still in them and some must be so dry that they crumble between his fingers. He must have some straws of wheat and some of barley and some of rye.

And when he had all the proper straws he must bind them with a magic twine and fasten them to a stick cut from a hickory nut tree.

Tom worked and worked. By the time the sun went down, he, too, was covered with a pile of discarded straws. Anyone looking at him would have thought that he, too, as well as all the witches round about him, were haystacks.

The brooms were finally done and Tom said, “When shall we fly?”

“Not until the moon is high.” said Granny. “First we must eat.”

She led Tom to the river bank where an old witch, more bent and wrinkled than all the rest, stirred some food in a big black pot over an open fire.

All the witches gathered round her and scolded for their dinner. Tom did not want anything to eat. He had heard strange tales of witches’ brew and he thought of all the horrible things that might be cooking in the pot.

Suddenly Granny dipped the cup and passed it to Tom.

“Drink It!”

He was afraid to refuse. He shut his eyes and swallowed it.

What a surprise! It was the most delightful concoction he had ever tasted. He felt suddenly light hearted and light-footed.

He was about to ask for more but suddenly the witches started climbing on their brooms. Tom looked and saw that the moon shone high. He ran for his broom.

He threw one leg across the hickory nut stick and instantly he soared into the sky. Granny was right beside him. They speed upwards and made great circles above the face of the earth.

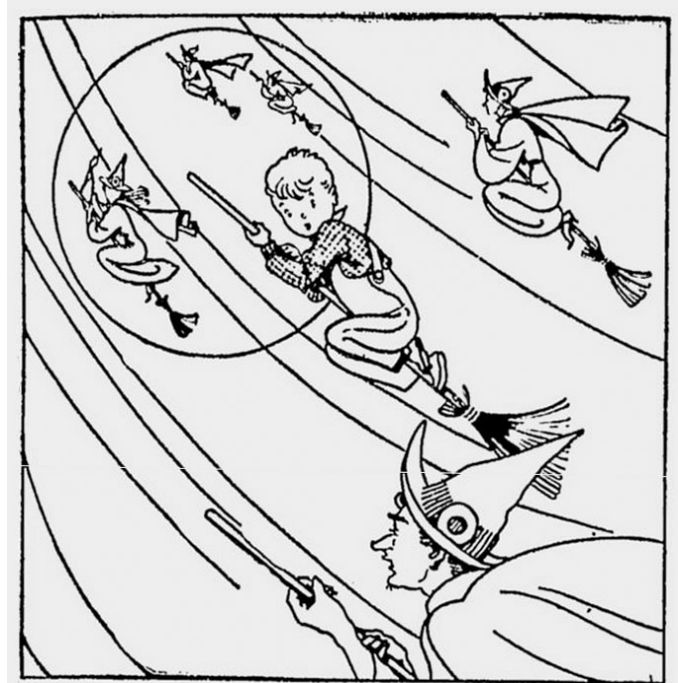
They flew over cities and oceans and mountains. Once Tom thought he was flying above his own town and could look down on his very own home far below.

The moon passed overhead and was sinking out of sight and still the witches flew on.

And then it happened! What they had all been waiting for. Two spinning lights appeared out of nowhere and streaked across the sky.

“There they are!” screamed Granny. “There are the flying saucers!”

Tom clutched his stick and stared in terror, for the whirling lights were speeding towards him. In an instant more they would crash into him and sweep him from the sky



Coloring suggestion: Sky purple. Moon yellow. Witches green.
Boy's jeans blue, hair orange. Faces flesh colored

Chapter 5

TOM GETS LOST

Just as the light seemed about to strike Tom they swerved and passed him by, Tom relaxed. But then the lights turned and spun down upon him again.

Tom looked frantically around. The witches had scattered all over the sky. Most of them were only faraway specks fading into the darker night.

But Granny still flew at Tom's side.

"Here it comes!" she suddenly screamed.

Tom threw himself forward over his broomstick. As he did so one of the lights swept over him. For an instant he was bathed in a bright glare.

Tom looked over his shoulder at the whirring disk. "How does it fly?" he wondered. "What makes it work? What is it trying to do?"

All these questions were swept from his mind as the saucer turned around and began to play tag with him. Faster than the wind, boy and saucer hurtled through the sky. Tom zigged this way and that way trying to escape. The saucer also zigged and zagged.

So intent was he on evading the saucer Tom never noticed he had left Granny far behind. When finally he looked around she was gone from the sky.

Now Tom was alone.

"This will surely be the end of me," he moaned. "I am tired and cannot escape these lights much longer."

Almost at that very moment, as if the saucer could read Tom's mind, it, and all the other saucers vanished as mysteriously as they had come. Tom looked about in amazement but the sky was black and he could see no light anywhere.

Now he had other worries.

Where was he? How would he get back to the witches' field?

The cold wind blew through Tom's thin clothes and he thought longingly of his own warm bed in his far away home.

"But," he said aloud, "I'll not go home until I find out what those flying saucers are. I wish I were in Santa Land. I'm sure Santa would know!"

No sooner had he spoken than he was swept up in a blizzard that carried him faster than ever through the sky. He could not tell whether the broom was carrying him or the storm. He was wrapped in a blanket of snow in a black night and for all he knew he might be traveling upside down.

But suddenly he was not traveling at all. He was buried in a snow drift!

When he dug his way out he found the storm had ended and daylight had come. He was at the bottom of a little hill in some strange and deserted land.

He hunted in the snow until he found his broom.

"I must get away from here," he thought, "for surely there are no people in this cold and far-away place."

But when he got on his broom nothing happened at all. Then he remembered what Granny had told him.

"Witches' brooms can fly only once and each night must be made anew."

With a sinking heart Tom looked at the snow covered land. He knew he would find no straw to make a new broom.

"Granny should have told me how to get back to the witches field," he said tearfully. "Or how to get some place. They shouldn't have left me alone in the sky."

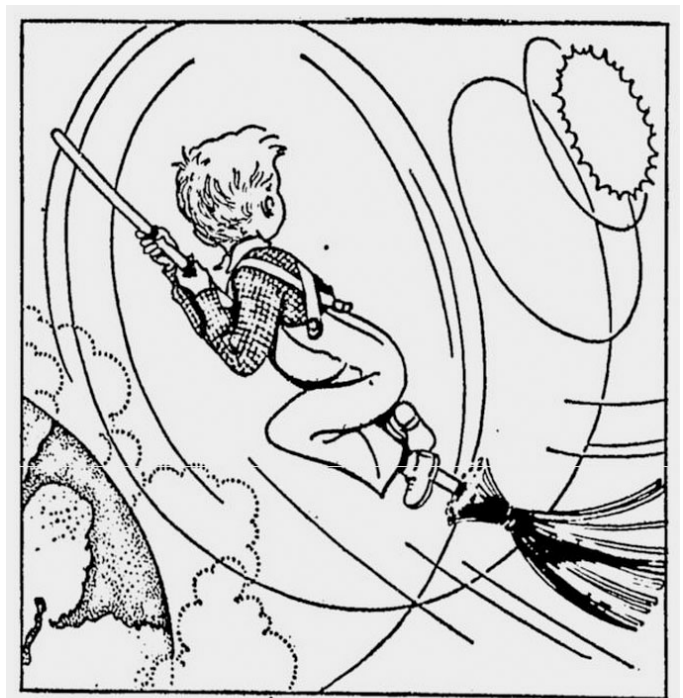
But then he remembered the second thing Granny had told him.

"Our brooms are wonderful. Wish to be in a place and you will be there."

Tom tried to remember. "I did wish to be some place!" he cried. "I wished I were in Santa Land."

He laughed with glee and clapped his hands in excitement. "Why, I bet this is Santa Land!"

And he ran madly up the snow-covered hill.



Coloring suggestion: Sky gray, flying saucer and broom yellow.
Earth blue and green. Boy's jeans blue, hair orange.

Chapter 6
TRAPPED

Whooping and laughing, Tom climbed the hill. When he reached the top he looked down on the far side and sure enough there was Santa Land in the valley below.

He knew it was Santa Land. What else could fit possibly be? There was a little cottage with red blinds and smoke curling out of a little red chimney. There were long rows of shop buildings. There was a stable - large enough to hold eight reindeer.

And there was a great red sleigh standing by the stable door!

But the real reason he knew that cause of the little folk. There were elves and brownies and fairies all about. He knew they were fairies even though they were bundled up warmly. He knew it because wings tuck out of holes cut in their red woolen snow suits!

"It was great finding out that Handsome the statue could talk and walk," thought Tom. "And it was fun flying with the witches. But this is the nicest thing of all."

His eyes shone with excitement as he ran down the hill. He waved his arms and cried out to the folk below.

"What will they say when they see me?" he wondered. "Perhaps they will think I have come for an early Christmas."

He cupped his hands around his mouth. "Hello! Hello!" he shouted.

The little folk turned towards him. Tom smiled and waved. He loved them all! He wanted them to know how glad he was to be there.

As soon as the Santa folk saw him they began running. They ran with their stocking caps flying out behind them and their coats flapping against their knees. They stumbled in the snow



Coloring suggestion: Trees green. Sky gray. Fairies red with green wings. Elves brown with white earmuffs and buttons

and tripped over each other and some even ran right out of their boots in their great enormous hurry.

As Tom watched them he stopped waving and smiling. He was hurt and puzzled. For the Santa folk were running not toward him but away from him and they ran as though they were afraid for their very lives.

In a moment there was not a soul to be seen in the streets of Santa Land. Tom stood there looking around hardly knowing what to do.

"I thought Santa Land folk liked children," he thought. "Why would they run from me?"

He decided he would go find them and ask them why they were scared of him. He matched down the street between the shops.

"Please come out," he called. "Don't be frightened!"

But there was no answer. His shout echoed down the empty alleys and bounced back at him from the empty shops.

Suddenly he saw someone in red behind a bush. He ran towards it.

"Why are you hiding from me?" he cried.

But it was only an empty coat left there by one of the folk who had run away from him.

"I will ask Santa," decided Tom. "Surely he won't be afraid of me."

He went towards the little red shuttered cottage at the head of the road. He had a feeling that he was being watched, that a hundred pair of eyes were staring at him.

He shuddered and looked over his shoulder. Just as he turned his head, the snow in front of him gave way and he fell through the ground into a hole. Before he could catch his breath a black bag was pulled down over his head and his arms were caught and held behind him.

Now there was a chattering and shouting and squealing all around him and to his astonishment Tom heard his captors cry:

"We have one!"

"We trapped one!"

"We caught a flying saucer!"

Chapter 7

TROUBLE IN SANTA LAND

The Santa four lifted their captive from the hole where they had trapped him. They pinched him and poked him with sticks and they marched him before them down the street.

When they reached Santa's little white cottage they banged on the door.

"Come see! Come see!"

The door opened and Santa Claus came out.

"We've caught one!" shouted the little folk. "We've caught a flying saucer!"

"Well, well," cried Santa, "Let me see it!"

They jerked the bag from the captive's head and there stood poor Tom. He was angry as could be.

Santa stared in astonishment. "Are you a flying saucer?"

"No, I am not! I am a boy. My name is Tom. How could anyone think me a flying saucer?"

Santa sat down on the steps and laughed and laughed. "You certainly don't look like a saucer to me. But why are you here? Where did you come from?"

Then Tom told Santa about the flying saucer which had been seen in his town and about his great wish to see one for himself. He told how the elf statue had taken him to the witches and how he had flown on a witch's broom and been chased by a flying saucer.

Finally he said, "Have you ever seen a flying saucer?"

All the elves and fairies sighed and nodded their heads. Santa was no longer laughing. "Yes," he said, "we have seen many

and if we cannot stop them I am afraid there will be no Christmas this year."

"No Christmas? Why not?"

"Because the reindeer have been frightened by the saucer and refuse to fly. One night I was exercising them when suddenly a light came flashing out from behind the moon.

"The deer shied away but the light danced circles around us. We could not escape it. Finally It disappeared. The poor reindeer flew back to the stables and have not come out since."

"Come see!" cried the elves.

They took Tom down to the stables. Santa's eight reindeer stood in their stalls. Their heads drooped and their eyes were filled with fear and shame. They did not look at all like the proud graceful creatures Tom had always imagined them.

"Now you see why the elves wanted to trap a flying saucer," said Santa. "Truly I do not know what we shall do if the deer will not fly on Christmas Eve."

"I will help you!" cried Tom. "I bet I can catch a flying saucer!"

The elves gathered round. "What will you do? We have dug traps all over the land and the only thing we ever caught was you."

"Why not put traps in the sky?" suggested Tom. "That's where the saucers are."

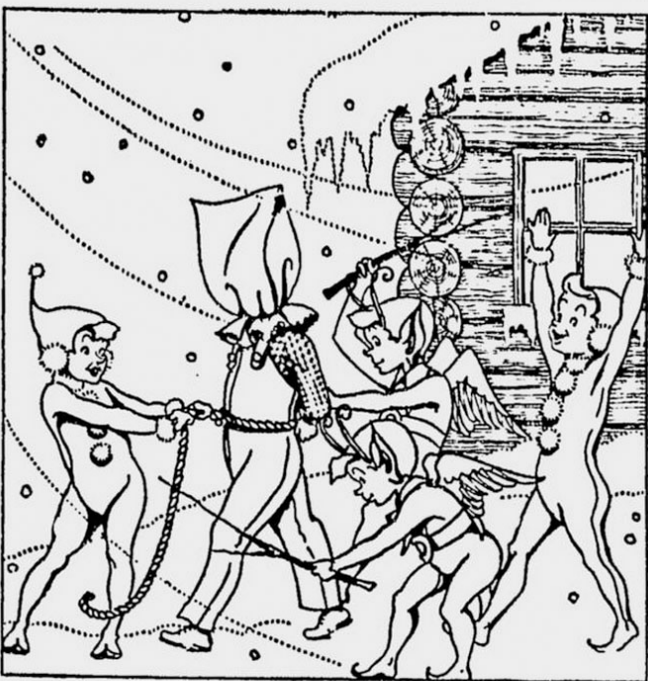
"How would we dig a hole in the sky?"

"We don't have to dig a hole. We'll build trap with balloons."

The little folk were delighted. They raced to the balloon shop and began blowing up balloons. There were barrels and barrels of them packed for Christmas delivery but, as Santa said, what was the use of saving them for Christmas if there wasn't going to be any Christmas?

The elves and fairies sat at their work benches and blew and blew and blew.

Meanwhile Santa and Tom went to the old string shop and began to weave a gigantic fish net in which they hoped to catch a saucer.



Coloring suggestion: Elves brown with white earmuffs and buttons. Fairies red with green wings. Sky gray. Cabin dark brown.

Chapter 8

TOM GOES AWAY

Tom and Santa worked through the day and through the night on their net.

Now it was almost done. Tom looked at it admiringly. Suddenly he had an awful thought.

“Suppose we do catch a flying saucer. What will we do with it?”

Santa shook his head. “I don’t know. It may be a wild thing that will destroy us all. Or it may be nothing but a mist that we cannot hold. Whatever it is we have to find out.”

Santa sounded tired and sad. Tom knew he was thinking of all the children in the world who would have no Christmas toys if Santa’s reindeer did not fly again.

At last the net was done. They rolled it into a giant ball and carried it to the shop where the elves and fairies were at work. The shop was filled to the ceiling with fat balloons - silver ones and blue and red and gold.

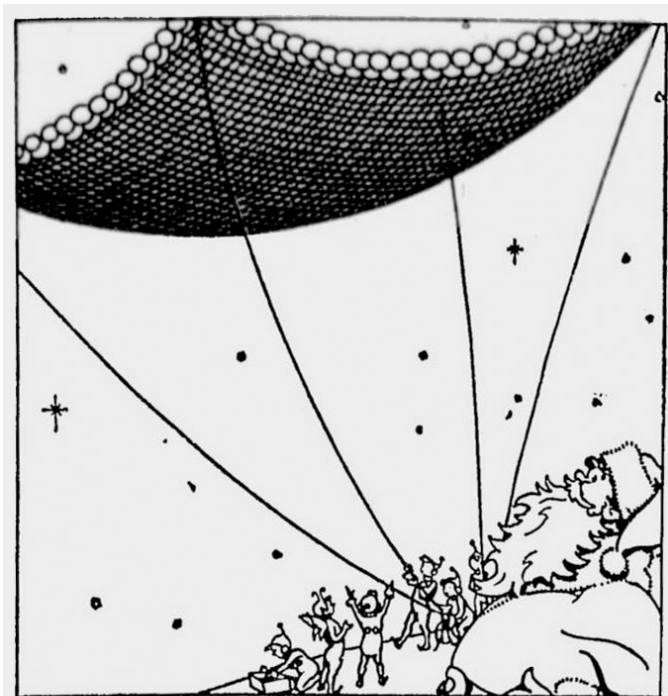
“Do we have enough?” asked the workers. Their words came out in funny little puffs and huffs. They had been blowing so long on the balloons that now they blew when they talked!

Santa said they had done a good job. Then they all set about tying the balloons to the giant fish net.

They carried the net to a nearby field and released the balloons. Up, up into the sky floated the thousands of balloons carrying the net between them.

Two long ropes on each end of the net were tied to the ground and kept the net from flying completely out of sight.

“Oh, this will surely catch us a saucer!” cried the workers with delight.



Coloring suggestion: Sky gray. Red and green balloons along edge of net. Santa’s suit red. Elves and fairies brown and red.

They were so happy they picked up Tom and carried him around on their shoulders. They sang a song about what a smart boy he was. Tom could not hide his pleasure. He had left home merely to see a flying saucer and here he was catching one and saving Christmas for all the world.

But, alas, catching a saucer was not that easy.

For 10 days and 10 nights the net floated in the sky. Time after time the Santa folk saw mysterious lights flashing through the sky but Tom’s trap never caught anything at all.

Christmas grew closer and still the reindeer would not fly.

Poor Tom! He was filled with shame at his failure. Santa told him it did not matter, that he had done his best. But Tom ached to see the disappointment in Santa’s eyes.

At last he got another idea. “Perhaps the balloons are too soft. They can be pushed out of the way. If we set a trap of kites with pins in them the pins will stick holes in the saucers and cause them to fall!”

The workers were willing to try again. They got together all the kites they had been building through the year. They put pins and nails in the ends of each stick and then set the kites to flying around all of Santa Land.

For 10 days and 10 night they took turns flying the kites. Seven times they saw a saucer. But not once did they catch one.

Now Tom was truly shamed. “I talked so big and did nothing at all,” he thought.

He could not bear to face Santa and the workers any longer.

“I will go away on my own,” he decided. “I will hunt and hunt and I will never give up until I catch a flying saucer.”

That night he crept out of his bed in Santa’s cottage and stole away from Santa Land.

Chapter 9

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

All night Tom struggled through the snow. He was cold and hungry but he did not think of these things. He thought only of the flying saucers and how he could capture one.

“If I get one and find out what makes it run I can get all of them and then Santa’s reindeer will fly again,” he told himself.

Morning came and he sat down to rest. He leaned against a tree and shut his eyes. Suddenly he heard someone talking. He could not tell what the words were but he could hear clearly a fussy voice nagging at something.

Who could it be?

Tom leaped up. He looked all around. He could see no one. The voice seemed to come from a nearby bush. Tom crept up and peered around it.

To his astonishment he saw a man sitting in the bush. He was a fat little man with a kind face. He was terribly upset about something. He muttered to himself and thrashed with his arms at the bush.

Tom could not imagine where the man had come from or what on earth he was trying to do.

“Can - can I help you?” he asked.

The little man continued to thrash about, getting more and more tangled in the thorny branches.

“Pleh em epacse siht retsnom,” cried the fellow irritably.

Tom had never heard such a language.

“Who are you? Where are you from?” he asked.

The man replied in the same senseless gibberish as before. As Tom strained to understand him he suddenly saw that though the man’s eyes were open he was blind. He did not know how to get out of the bush,

“Here,” said Tom kindly. “Do not struggle so.” He caught the man’s arms and gently pulled him out.

The man sighed with relief. He talked again in his strange language and groped his way uncertainly through the snow. There was a look of sadness and hopelessness on his face.

“I cannot just leave him here like this,” thought Tom. “I must find where he comes from and take him home.”

But when he looked round for the man’s tracks there were none to be seen. Tom’s own footprints were the only ones leading to the bush where the man had been found.

“Who are you? Where are you from?” cried Tom again.

“Gnik morf Sram,” replied the man smiling amiably.

Tom shook his head helplessly. What could the man be saying? And how could he have gotten there without leaving tracks? Tom searched in the bush where he had found the fellow and hoped he might find there the answer to his questions.

And suddenly he did find the answer.

Caught in the crumpled branches of the bush were the pieces of a broken kite. Tom stared at it in disbelief. It was one of the kites the Santa Land workers had flown to catch a flying saucer. It had struck something and brought it to earth.

Tom’s legs trembled under him. If the something was a flying saucer then the flying saucer must be this fat little man with the sightless eyes who stood here by his side!

But where was the light? Where the whirring noise that went with a flying saucer? Tom did not know. He only knew for sure that this strange man had been flying and had been trapped by one of the kites.

For a fleeting moment Tom was afraid. He looked around for something to protect himself with. But even as he did so he knew in his heart that the man was already helpless, that he was lost and miserable and ready to do anything Tom wished of him.

The trembling in Tom’s legs stopped. He found his voice at last.

“Come with me.”

He took the old fellow’s hand and led him back towards Santa Land.



Coloring suggestion: Sky gray. Tree trunk dark brown. Boy’s jean blue, face flesh colored, hair orange. Mars King’s suit green with yellow trim. Trees green except for white snow.

Chapter 10

THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED

Tom took the strange little fat man back to Santa Land. He told Santa and all the elves and fairies the story of how he had found the man in a bush with the broken pieces of a Santa Land kite.

Santa and his workers stared at the man. They could not believe this poor blind creature was the one who, all aflame, had been whirling through the skies.

The little elves chattered among themselves. At the same time the little man chattered to himself. But he spoke always in his strange language and no one could understand him.

Presently Santa said, "Perhaps if he writes down what he says we can make sense of it."

He put a pencil and paper in the old man's hands. But the man wrote nothing. Either because he was blind or because he did not know how to write.

"Gnik morf Sram" he said over and over.

Santa took the pencil and paper and wrote down the words. He went to his desk and studied them. He studied for a long time. Suddenly he exclaimed. "I have it!"

"What is it?" cried Tom. "What does it, mean?"

"His words are spelled backwards," said Santa. "He says, 'King from Mars!'"

"King from Mars!" cried everyone in amazement. "Does that mean he came from Mars in a flying saucer?"

"Ask him," directed Santa. "I will take down his words and read them backwards."

The elves did as they were told and the little fat man at last was able to tell them his story. He could understand their language but could speak only in his which was the way with all the kings from Mars.

"Are there more kings?" Tom wanted to know.

"Every grown man on Mars is a king," replied the man.

"Then whom do you rule?"

"Kings do not rule. We are ruled by the children of Mars."

"The children rule?"

"Of course."

"Do you live in palaces?"

"We build palaces for the children to live in. We do everything the children require of us. It is the duty of the kings to carry out the slightest wish of the children. Alas, that is why I am here today and why other kings are even now flying about the world and will perhaps never find a resting place."

"Then you are a flying saucer?"

Yes, the King said. He was a flying saucer and it was a sad thing really but what could be done about it?



Coloring suggestion: Santa's suit red with white trim. Mars King's suit green with yellow trim. Boy's jeans blue, hair orange. Elf and fairy, brown and red. Faces flesh colored.

Then he told them the light on Mars was very poor. People had to strain their eyes so much that by the time they grew up to be kings they were practically blind.

The children on Mars didn't like the idea of growing up to be blind so they ordered the kings to make more light on Mars.

For years and years the kings tried to figure out a way to get more light. At last they invented a machine that would wind a man up very tight and shoot him into space. He would shoot off with such force that he would never stop spinning and he would go so fast that sparks flew from his body and surrounded him with a saucer of light.

When the kings told the children what they had invented the children said good, we will try it out. And they began shooting kings into the sky - one king every six months because it took that long to wind a man up.

But the machine had such force it shot the kings right out of Mars sky and down into Earth's skies.

So Mars still had poor light and the kings were twirling, perhaps forever around Earth.

Chapter 11

TOYS AND SPECTACLES

"I myself," said the King from Mars, "would be a flying saucer still if I had not been snagged by some strange object in the sky."

Santa told him the strange object had been a kite with pins in it and that it had been flown especially to catch him or any other flying saucer.

"Because you see," said Santa, "my reindeer are afraid of flying saucers. They are so afraid that they will not fly and that means I can deliver no toys on Christmas Day."

"Reindeer?" said the old man. "Toys? Christmas? What are these things?"

By now everyone was so used to hearing the King talk backwards that they could understand him without Santa's writing the words down and changing them around frontwards for them.

Santa told the King about his magic reindeer - the only deer in the world that could fly. He told him about toys and about the meaning of Christmas on earth.

The Mars King's face brightened when he heard the tale.

"Oh, if I could see such things!" he exclaimed.

"You shall see them all," said Santa.

"But Santa," cried Tom. "You forget. The King is blind."

"Not blind." said Santa. "His eyes are strained from using them in poor light. Mine used to be that way when I worked too long by candlelight."

Santa went to his desk and drew out a pair of spectacles from his bottom drawer. He put them on the King's nose.

The King cried out in astonishment. He looked at Santa and all the grinning elves and fairies and at Tom standing at his side.

"How strange!" he exclaimed.

"Some of you have wings!" He turned to Tom. "You don't have wings. Can you fly?"

"I flew on a witch's broom once," said Tom. "A flying saucer chased me out of the sky."

"I hope it was not I," said the King. "You know the flying saucers are blind and cannot tell where they are whirling. Oh, if only the people on Mars could have these wonderful glasses! What a different view of things they would get!"

"Where is your space suit?" asked Tom suddenly.

"What in Mars is a space suit?"

"Come see!" cried the elves. "We have lots of space suits. We made them for children for Christmas."

They took the King to the shops and showed him their wonderful suits with plastic helmets and oxygen tanks.

"Here is one that will fit you," said Santa. "Try it on."

The King climbed into a suit. He fitted the helmet over his head and fastened on the oxygen tank.

"My stars!" he cried. "This is what everyone on Mars should wear! I feel so different now."

He started to take off the suit but Santa said, "Keep it. It's a Christmas gift."

The King smiled gratefully.

"Thank you. It makes me feel like a king. I never really felt like one before."

"Good," said Santa. "From now on we shall call you Majesty. Do you suppose that if all the kings on Mars had such suits they would feel more like kings and act like kings should act?"

The King nodded. "I am sure of it. They might even be able to rule the children instead of being ruled by them."

Tom said, "What kind of toys do the children on Mars have?"

"There is no such thing," said Majesty. "Show me these toys you speak of."

They took him through the shops and showed him the bicycles and dolls and trains. They showed him baseballs and skates and wagons. Marbles and games and tennis rackets. Jackstraws and bobjacks and cowboy guns.

"Oh," said the King, "If the children on Mars had such things to play with they would be too busy to want to rule."

"I've been thinking of something," said Santa. "Why not take these spectacles and space suits and toys to Mars?"



Coloring suggestion: Santa Claus suit red with white trim, boots black. Mars King's suit green with yellow trim. Faces flesh colored.

Chapter 12

PACKING UP FOR MARS

The Mars King peered at Santa through his glasses.

“Do you mean we really could take spectacles and space suits and toys to Mars?”

“Why not?” smiled Santa, “My reindeer can cover the whole Earth in one night. It should not take them much longer than that to fly to Mars.”

“Think of it!” cried the King. “Oh, what a difference these wonderful things will make to the kings and the children of Mars. When will we start?”

“Right, now!”

Santa ordered the elves to fill a bag with special spectacles, the kind of spectacles that keep people from straining their eyes in poor light.

He ordered the brownies to fill a bag with space suits - big ones and small ones to fit both big and little kings.

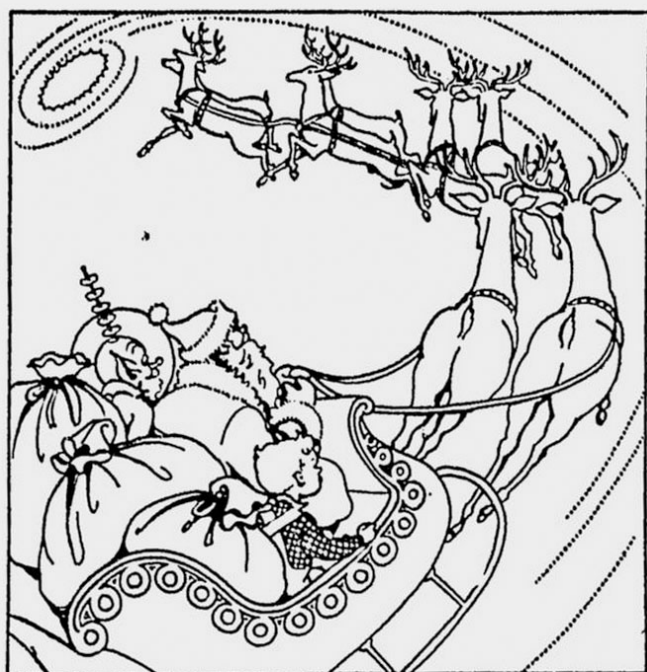
Finally he ordered the fairies to fill a bag with toys - with books and mouth harps and crayons. With baby dolls and foot balls. Bows and arrows, dump trucks and sand pails and all the other kind of toys that children all over the world play with.

These bags were very heavy and very big as you can imagine. But Santa's sleigh is a very special sleigh and can hold any number of big bags. And his reindeer are special too and can pull any load - no matter how heavy it may be.

But now Tom had a sudden thought.

“What about the reindeer? Will they fly now?”

“I think so,” said Santa. “I will explain to them about the lights and they will understand.”



Coloring suggestion: Reindeer brown. Flying saucer and sleigh yellow. Sky blue. santa, boy and Mars King as usual.

He took the King to the stables where the reindeer stood with drooping heads. Santa told the deer that the whirling lights which had so frightened them were really just kings from Mars like the fat little man beside him.

“We call this king ‘Majesty,’” said Santa. “He is our friend and doesn't mean us any harm.”

The deer listened. They seemed to understand, but they did not seem very happy. Santa led them out of the stable. He hitched them to his sleigh. Then the workers loaded in the great bags. Tom and Majesty climbed in behind.

Finally Santa climbed in. Over his shoulder he carried still a fourth bag. It was enormous and of the strangest shape!

“What is that?” asked Tom.

“Secret,” replied Santa. He winked.

Santa cracked his whip in the air and cried, “Away! Away for Mars!”

A long moment passed. Nothing happened at all. Then, while everyone held his breath and hoped, the reindeer slowly rose into the air. For another long moment they paused above the snow covered Santa Land and then they began to circle into the sky.

But just a Santa was sure everything was going to be all right he spied a light from the East.

“A flying saucer!” cried Tom.

Majesty leaned far out of the sleigh.

“Oh, poor king, poor king,” he moaned. “If only we could get him down!” He began to call out in his own Mars language. “Have courage. King of Mars! We will find a way to rescue you!”

The light zoomed past humming and twirling and casting off sparks.

“Dear me,” sighed Majesty. “I am sure that was a cousin of mine. I could tell by the way he zigzagged. He never could walk a straight line. Poor cousin!”

Cousin or not, the flying saucer was coming back and now an awful thing happened. The reindeer were frightened again, turned around and headed straight for home.

Santa cracked his whip. He begged and ordered. It did no good. The reindeer were through. As long as a flying saucer remained in the sky they could never fly again.

Back to the stable they went to hang their heads in their stalls. The King and Tom and Santa sat in the sleigh and stared at Santa's bulging bags and wondered what on earth to do next.

Chapter 13

A SPACE SHIP

It was clear to all that Santa's reindeer would never fly again.

"Oh, dear," said the King. "How can we get these to Mars now?"

"More than that," said Santa. "How shall I deliver toys around the world on Christmas Eve?"

The answer came from Tom. He didn't know it was the answer. He was just thinking out loud. He said, "If only we had a space ship!"

"That's the very thing!" cried Santa.

Then he told them that for years he had been working on the plans for a space ship.

"Everyone used to want cowboy things for Christmas," Santa said. "Now I get letters every year asking for space ships. I've been trying to make one and, as matter of fact, I have some good plans on my desk now."

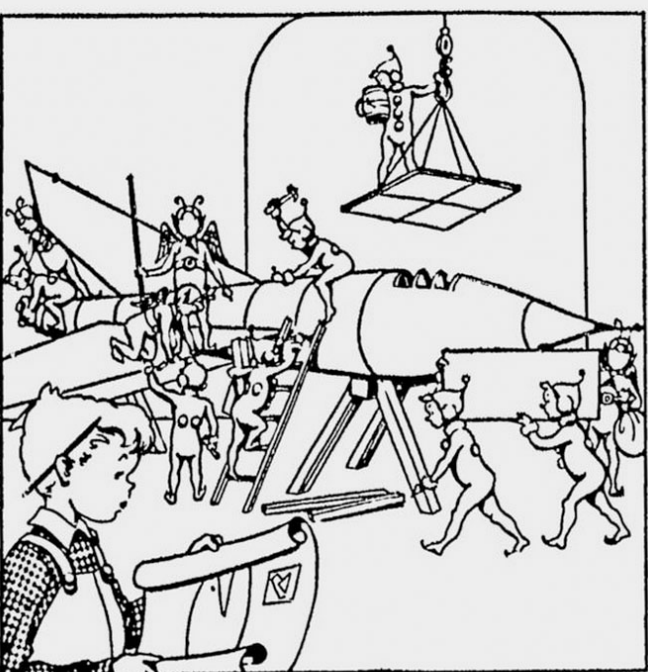
He hurried to his cottage and got out an enormous pile of blueprints. These were the plans for the space ship.

"I hadn't thought to build it for many years because I didn't think children were quite ready for space travel. But now, well, do you think we could put it together in a hurry?"

The Santa workers poured over the plans. They pointed things out to each other, frowned and murmured together in little groups. They scratched their heads, clicked their tongues, measured and counted with their fingers.

Finally they said, "We can do it."

"Will it really fly to Mars?" asked Majesty.



Coloring suggestion: Fairies red, elves brown, ladder and trestle dark brown, boy's jeans blue and hair orange, doorway grey.

"Oh, certainly. If it flies at all it will fly to Mars."

"How long will it take to build it?"

"Two days and two nights."

"Hooray!" cried Tom. "Let's get started!"

In a few moments every creature in Santa Land was at work on the space ship.

Santa shut himself in his private work room. It was his job to make the secret force that would drive the ship through space.

The Mars King stuffed his pockets and hands and mouth with screws and nails. He became a sort of walking pin cushion. When anyone needed a bolt or tack he had only to yell for the King.

Tom was the errand boy who carried messages and copied plans and made lists of things needed.

Even Mrs. Claus helped. She rolled up her sleeves and mixed batter and baked wonderful things in her oven. Not for a moment did she sleep or even sit in her easy rocker by the kitchen fire.

She brought out basket after basket of fresh doughnuts and cookies and cakes. She kept a big pitcher filled with a wonderful Santa Land drink. It was made of snow and chocolate soda and whip cream and gelatin and cherries and some secret ingredient of her own that made it taste like no other drink in all the world.

In exactly two days and two nights the space ship was done. But alas, Santa had planned it for a child and there was room only for two people in it. And no room at all for Santa's four huge bags.

"We must do the best we can," said Santa. "It would take me years to plan a bigger ship. We must draw lots to see who will go."

He put three slips of paper in his stocking hat. Then Majesty and Tom and Santa himself reached in and each took out a paper. The King's paper said "Go." Tom's paper said "Go." Santa's paper said "Stay."

"Never mind," said Santa. "I will come later. The thing for you to do is find some way of putting a stop to the flying saucers. When you have done that, my reindeer will fly and I will bring my bags and join you on Mars.

"Now, then, speed away. Our time is very short."

Chapter 14

MARS

Tom and the Mars King climbed into the tiny space ship. There was scarcely room for the two of them to sit with their knees hunched up and their arms hugging their sides.

Tom was too excited to care about his uncomfortable position. As for the King, he felt that riding in a space ship was much more comfortable than whirling through the sky as a flying saucer.

He still wore his space suit and said he would never take it off.

Santa showed them how to operate the ship. Then he slammed the door. Tom and Majesty looked out through tiny windows and waved to all the Santa Land folks.

“Goodbye! Come back soon!” shouted the little people.

Then Tom pressed a button and the space ship zoomed into the air. In an instant they were far above Santa Land. Tom peered out the window. He could see the whole Atlantic Ocean. It looked like a small lake. Next to it was America and on the far side of America was the Pacific Ocean.

He could see it, all quite plainly. Then he was too far away to see clearly and the whole world was just a ball spinning below him.

Presently they approached another ball. It was orange and had eyes and mouth like a man. At first Tom was frightened to see such a face in the sky. But suddenly he knew it was only the moon.

On and on they went. They passed many stars glittering in the skies. Before long they approached Mars itself.

“Look!” cried Tom. “We are going to land!”

Sure enough, the ship glided gently to the surface of the planet and came to a stop. Tom pressed a button and the door of the ship flew open.

Tom stepped out into a land stranger than any he ever dreamed of.

There was neither tree nor bush nor flower. No grass. Not even a weed. Running through the barren ground were streaks of yellow. Tom dropped to his knees and ran his fingers along a yellow streak. When he looked up his eyes were wide with wonder.

“Gold!” he whispered. “It’s gold dust!”

The Mars King nodded sadly. “That’s the worst part of our planet. Wherever we look we find that awful gold dirt.”

“But,” cried Tom, “you are rich beyond compare! Gold is money!”

“Money? There is no such thing on Mars. What we would like is grass and trees and daisies. We have no need for gold.”

Tom looked around and saw that in truth it was a drab and lonesome land. To make matters worse it was neither dark nor light but a sort of perpetual gloom halfway between night and day.

“If nothing grows here how do you get food to eat?” asked Tom.

“We make our food out of chemicals,” said Majesty. “We pack vitamins and minerals and other things into capsules and that is what we eat.”

“Goodness, it must be pretty boring,” said Tom.

Majesty nodded. “I suppose it is. But we have never had any other way of eating and this seems good enough to us.”

“It is very strange,” said Tom suddenly.

“What is so strange?”

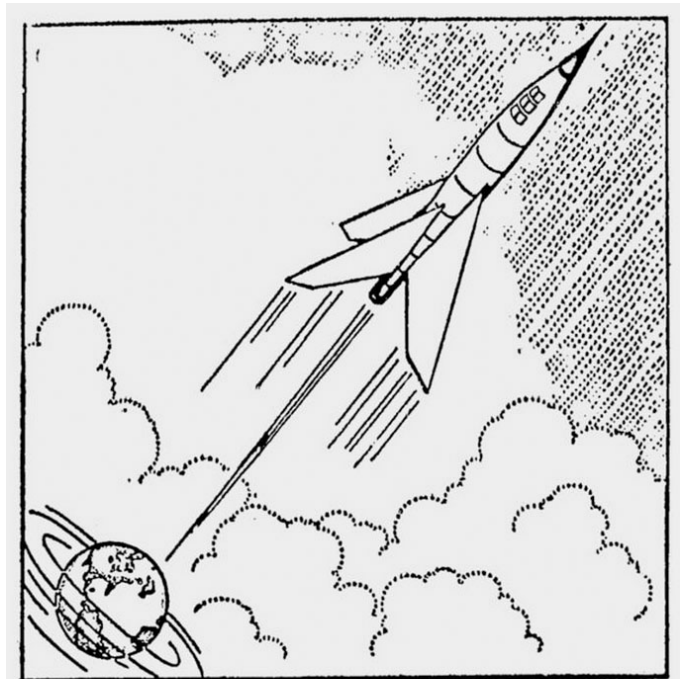
“Well, you people have invented such remarkable things like turning men into flying saucers and packing meals into capsules. Yet you never invented any toys. Doesn’t that seem strange to you?”

The King nodded. “Yes it is surprising. But perhaps it’s because we have never had a Santa Claus on Mars.” He took Tom’s hand.

“Come now I will show you the kings’ palaces. They lie just beyond the golden hill.”

They climbed the solid gold hill and when they reached the top they saw below row after row of splendid palaces. Every palace was made of solid gold.

Even from where he stood Tom could see boys and girls standing idly in the golden courtyards. These children were the rulers of Mars.



Coloring suggestion: Sky in upper righthand corner dark blue, middle region of sky light blue. Exhaust from space ship red.

Chapter 15

THE KING OF MARS

Tom and the Mars King started down the mountain. Suddenly Tom halted.

"I hear a strange sound - like men crying!"

They looked all about but could see nothing. They continued on their way. The moaning grew louder.

"It's the mountain!" cried Tom.

The King threw himself to the ground and tried to listen. But the space helmet he wore kept him from putting his ear to the ground.

"Take it off!" urged Tom.

"I dare not. It's the first time I ever felt like a king. If I take it off I shall be weak and not able to act like a king."

Tom laid down and pressed his ear to the golden mountain. "It is true. The mountain itself is crying!"

"No. no." said Majesty. "It is the crying of the kings. They are shut up in the mountain!"

They searched for an opening to the mountain. At last, on the side facing away from the palaces, they came to a pile of golden rocks. Here the moaning was loudest of all.

Tom and the King hurled away the rocks.

They uncovered a hole large enough to crawl through.

"Come out! Come out!" cried Majesty.

The moaning stopped. There was a long wait and then, one by one, the kings of Mars crawled out.

They did not look like kings - certainly not like kings of a golden planet. Majesty talked with them and told them who he was. They remembered him well. They groped their way to him and told him the sad tale of what had happened to them since he left.

They spoke in their Mars language. Tom was glad he had come to understand it almost as well as his own.

The children of Mars had grown angry, said the Kings, because the intervention of the flying saucers did not bring more light to the planet. They had grown tired, too, of spinning the kings off into space as flying saucers. So the children had imprisoned them all in the mountain and there it seemed likely they would remain forever.

"And you, too!" they cried. "Ah, you should never have come back!"

"Be of good cheer," said Majesty. "I have a friend named Santa Claus. He will save us all."

Then he told of his flight to the Earth planet and his visit to Santa Land, Of the wonderful spectacles Santa had given him so that he could see as well as ever. And of the space suit he wore which made him feel strong and brave and kingly.



Coloring suggestion: The mountainside and its radiation lines streaked with yellow. Buildings green with red roofs. Sky blue. Mars King and boy as usual.

"Now," he finished, "all we have to do is get the flying saucers out of the sky and then Santa Claus will bring us all spectacles and space suits and we shall all be happy as kings."

The Mars kings marveled to hear this strange news. They went back in their mountain and sought for a way to recall the flying saucers.

"If we invented the machine to send our kings whirling through space, surely we can invent one that will bring them home again," said Majesty.

And he was right. In a very short time the kings had planned a fabulous affair. It was a huge vacuum cleaner that could suck particles from the air - even particles as large as flying saucers and as far away as the Earth.

Tom and Majesty set about getting the materials and the kings labored to put it together. At last it was ready. But as they prepared to take it out of the mountain there was a sudden clamor from without.

"The children!" quavered the tired old kings. "The children are coming!"

Chapter 16

THE CHILDRENS PLAN

The children of Mars gathered around the hole in the golden mountain.

“Come out, kings!” they shouted.

In the mountain, the kings shivered. They started to obey the command.

“Wait!” cried Majesty fiercely. “We are kings! Kings must rule. We do not have to obey children!” The kings shook their heads sorrowfully. “We do not have your courage and strength,” they mumbled, They went out of the mountain and stood before the children.

Tom and Majesty hid within. They guarded the vacuum machine which the kings had made to suck the flying saucers from the sky.

“Who removed the rocks this opening?” demanded the children.

The kings hung their heads. They were silent.

“Answer!”

Unhappily the kings obeyed. They told of the return of Majesty who had been a flying saucer.

“Where is he? Who is the one?” cried the children.

“He hides within the mountain,” said the kings helplessly.

“Bring him out!”

Suddenly Majesty stood at the entrance to the mountain. “No need to bring me out,” he said bravely. “I am here.”

The children were delighted at the strange sight of a king in a space suit. They snatched at it and clamored for Majesty to take it off.

Majesty climbed to the top of the heaped up golden rocks.

“Quiet!” he cried. “I am a king. You will treat me as a king!”

The children stared at him in astonishment. Never had they heard a king speak so boldly. They looked at one another and wondered what they should do. They decided they had best obey such a kingly king.

At that moment a dreadful thing happened. The rocks on which the King stood suddenly tumbled apart and his Majesty crashed to the bottom of the pile.

His space helmet was smashed to bits. Worse, his spectacles fell from his nose and were crushed beneath the rocks.

Now Majesty was like all the other kings of Mars. He was weak and sightless and afraid. The children were quick to see the change that had come over him. They ordered all the kings back into the mountain and Majesty obeyed as did the others.

But as the children began shutting up the entrance a voice suddenly cried.

“Let me out! Don’t shut me in here!”

And there stood Tom with the vacuum machine in his arms.

“Who are you? Where did you come from? What do you want?” cried the children.

“I am a child - just like you,” said Tom. “I come from the planet Earth. There Kings rule and children obey.”

“What nonsense! Come with us and we will show you how we live.”

They rolled the last of the rocks in front of the mountain opening. Then they led Tom to their city of golden palaces. Tom still carried the precious vacuum machine.

“What is that you ca.rry?” asked one of the children.

At first Tom was afraid to answer. Finally, he said, “It is a machine. Would you like to see how it works?”

He did not know what he would do if they said yes. But fortunately the children were too excited about showing their own things.

“We will see the machine later.” they said. “Now you must see where we live.”

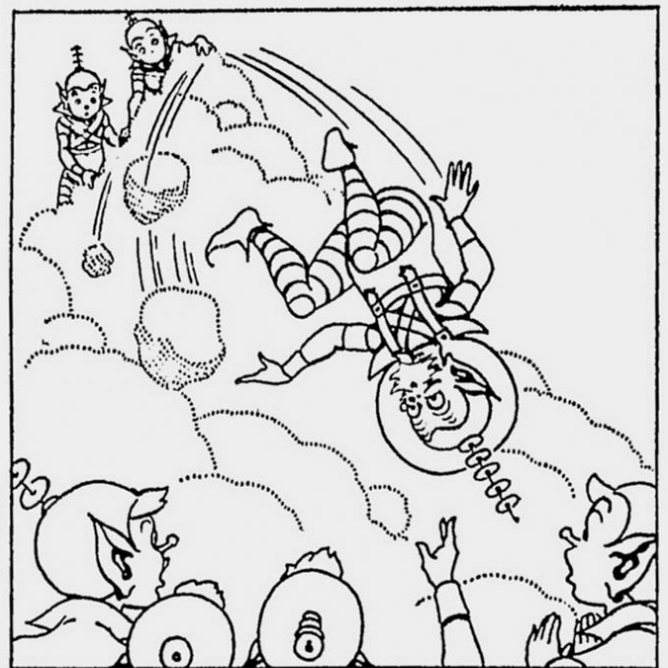
They led Tom through the palaces and showed him the golden furniture and golden tapestries which hung from the walls.

But there were no books or toys anywhere.

“What do you do all day to amuse yourselves?” asked Tom.

The faces of the children were pale and unhappy.

“What is there to do except torment the kings?” they replied.



Coloring suggestion: Mars King green with yellow trimmings. Mountain streaked with yellow. Children purple. Faces flesh colored.

Chapter 17

THE BIG STORM

Tom walked with the children of Mars in their golden palaces.

“Why do you not let your kings rule as kings should?” he asked.

The children laughed. “When people grow old enough to become kings they become blind and weak. You see for yourself. How can they rule?”

“What do little girls do when they grow up?” asked Tom.

“Oh, they go to school.”

“School?” exclaimed Tom. “I do not understand this land at all. Everything is backwards. Children command. Kings obey. Mothers go to school. You even talk backwards!”

“You certainly would not expect us to go to school when we are children!” retorted the youngsters. “We are supposed to have fun when we are little.”

“Why, you don’t know what fun is.” replied Tom. “In fact, you are not really children at all.”

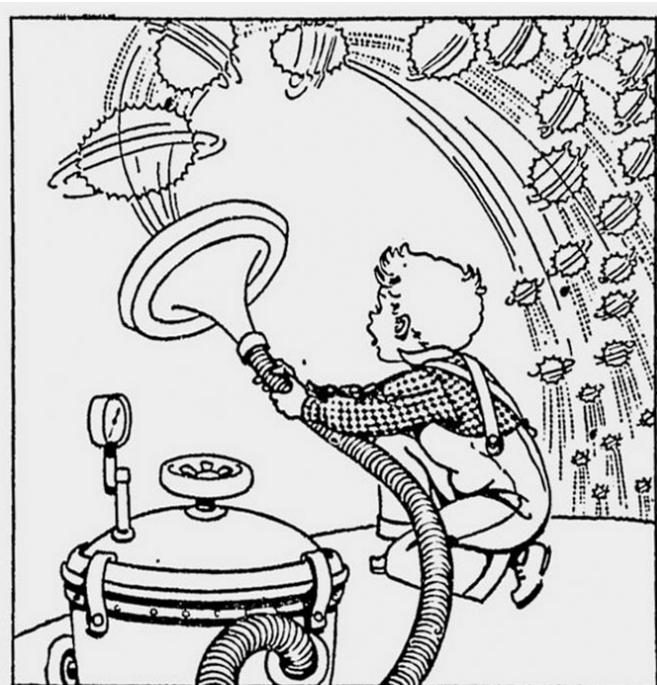
“We don’t understand you!” snapped the children irritably.

“Anyway, we are about to get rid of the kings once and for all. We are tired of their stumbling ways.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Tom in alarm.

“We will put great heat to the golden mountain and it will melt and bury the kings in gold. Come along you can see the fun.”

The children dashed away. Tom watched them until they were out of sight. Then he set down the vacuum machine and pointed it carefully into outer space. He set the controls and checked the connections.



Coloring suggestion: Saucer yellow. Sky blue. Machine gray with red trim. Boy’s jeans blue, hair orange

Then he pulled the switch and waited.

Meantime, it was Christmas Eve in Santa Land.

But it was not like any other Christmas Eve that had ever been before. Santa’s reindeer would not fly and Santa could not make his rounds that night.

With head bowed Santa stood at the stable door. His bags, stuffed with gifts, lay beside him. His workers gathered glumly around. No one spoke. No one knew what to do.

Suddenly breeze sprang up. It grew stronger and stronger. Soon it became a storm, and finally, a tornado. The workers rushed for cover. The buildings shook. The reindeer cowered.

But Santa stayed at the stable door. He was no longer unhappy. He was smiling. He held tight to the door to keep from being sucked away by the wind.

He knew what the wind was. He knew it was caused by something on Mars. His eyes never left the skies. Soon he saw what he had been waiting for.

Twelve saucers were sucked one by one from the earth’s sky. At one instant they could be seen whirling upwards and the next instant they were gone into outer space.

The storm lasted only a moment. Then, as quickly as it had come, it died away. The workers burst from their hiding places.

“Look! Santa is packing the sleigh!”

Sure enough Santa was throwing bag after bag into his big red sleigh.

“Bring out the reindeer!” he shouted merrily.

“But - but!” protested the elves. “You’ve forgotten. The reindeer won’t fly!”

“They will fly now. The flying saucers have gone for good. The reindeer have nothing more to fear.”

The little folk cheered. They took the deer from the stable and hitched them to the sleigh. In some strange way the deer knew without being told that there was no more danger in the skies for them.

A moment more and they started on their rounds.

“The first stop - Mars!” cried Santa.

And the reindeer cheerfully obeyed.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

While Santa rode through the night sky, the children of Mars laid heat sticks around the golden mountain. Soon the terrible heat would melt the mountain and bury the kings in gold.

Meantime, behind the mountain, Tom stood at the fabulous vacuum machine until it had sucked all the flying saucers from the skies. The poor kings who had been flying saucers were grateful but unhappy.

“What have we to look forward to in this land?” they moaned. “If the children do not send us out as flying saucers they will think of something else just as bad for our fate.”

“Come with me to the golden mountain.” said Tom. “Very soon now a friend from earth will arrive and show you wonderful things.”

They arrived at the mountain just in time. Even above the clamor of the children Tom could hear the far away tinkle of silver sleigh bells

“Here he comes! Here comes Santa!” he cried.

And out of the sky came the eight reindeer, flying proudly and gracefully and carrying Santa and his bags in the great red sleigh behind.

The children fell back in terror. They had never before seen reindeer or sleigh or whiskered creature. They thought some powerful spirit had come to punish them. They hid their heads and wept in fear.

Santa looked and smiled. He winked at Tom. Then he hid sway his smile and cried out sternly:

“Take your heat away from the golden mountain!”

The children rushed to obey.

“Let the kings come forth!”

The children hastily pulled the rocks from the mountain opening and the kings came out. Santa recognized Majesty among them.

“Majesty! Come and help me with my bags.” He lifted the bulging bags of spectacles into Majesty’s arms. Happily Majesty opened the bag and drew out a pair of glasses for himself. Then he handed glasses to all the kings of Mars.

Next Santa opened the bag or space suits and every king soon wore a helmet and carried an oxygen tank strapped to his back.

Now the kings held their heads high. They felt strong and able. They felt like kings.

The children meanwhile looked on in awe. They held one another’s hands and sniffled and sighed unhappily.

Santa smiled. He lifted a third bag from the sleigh. Tom helped him open it and together they poured out all the toys of the Earth children before the children of Mars.

For a long time the children looked without moving. Then they burst into happy cries and fell upon the toys.

While the kings discussed kingly affairs and the children played with their wonderful toys, Santa quietly opened a fourth bag. It held a little fir tree. Its green branches were hung with glittering balls and at it top was a shining star.

The kings and the children saw it and gathered around.

“What is it?” they whispered in wonder.

“A Christmas tree,” said Santa. “It is the best present I bring you. It stands for peace and goodness between all men even between the kings and children of Mars.”

Then Santa made the Mars people promise that was the way it would be with them. The kings would rule and the children would play. The mothers would come out of school and the children would take their places at the study desks.

“And learn how to speak frontwards, too,” said Santa with a laugh. “And no more flying saucers, ever.”

The Mars people thanked Santa for all he had done and Santa promised to visit them every Christmas season.



Coloring suggestion: Santa Claus’ suit red with white trim. Children’s suits purple with yellow trim. Tree green with yellow and red ornaments. Boy’s jeans blue.

Now Santa turned to Tom and said, “Well, have you had enough adventures for a while?”

Tom grinned. “I have only one wish.” he said.

“What is that?”

“To be home, in my bed, with my stocking hung by the chimney side.”

“Come with me,” laughed Santa. “I’ll have you there in a twinkling.”

They climbed in the sleigh. As they rose above Mars, Santa leaned out and shouted “Merry Christmas!”

For a moment the people below were too puzzled at the strange words to reply. Then, one by one, they took up the joyous message and shouted back in Santa’s own language:

“Merry Christmas! A Merry Christmas to all the world!”

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