



Santa and the STRONG BOY

by LUCRECE HUDGINS BEALE



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Chapter 1

A PRINCE IS BORN

Once upon a time, many years ago, there lived three little men named Noodle, Tiggie and Livingstone.

They were only six inches tall! They lived in a house made of half a watermelon rind and they fed on fresh boiled buttercups and acorn stew.

The watermelon house was also a workshop, for the three little men were good fairy wizards. They spent their entire lives making magic potions.

Three of their potions were strength, courage and wisdom.

Whenever a prince was born in the kingdom of Mitzenpoo, Noodle, Tiggie and Livingstone would go in invisible cloaks, to the palace and, before the prince was 9 hours old, they would sprinkle him with their magic potions of strength, courage and wisdom.

No one ever saw the three little men but it never failed that the princes of Mitzenpoo grew up to be kings of great courage, strength and wisdom. This was the way it had been for 300 years and, as a result, Mitzenpoo was the happiest and fairest kingdom in the land.



The Fairy Wizards rushed to make the magic potions

Now, by and by, it happened that there was a king of Mitzenpoo who had no sons. This made the king very sad for he was getting old and he needed a son to help him care for his people.

The king wished and wished for a son and finally his wish came true: a son was born.

While the whole kingdom rejoiced, Noodle, Tiggie and Livingstone were in a frenzy. It had been so long since a prince was born that when the three little men looked in their cupboard they found that their potions of strength, courage and wisdom had completely dried up.

“We must make new batches!” groaned Tiggie. “And quickly, for the prince is already 4 hours old and if we wait past nine hours the magic will not work.”

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” moaned Livingstone. “This rushing makes me so nervous. If only we had known a prince was on the way!”

“Never mind,” said Noodle. “We must do the best we can. I’ll read the recipe and you, Tiggie, measure the ingredients and you, Livingstone, do the mixing.”

So they worked and the hours flew by one, two, three until the new prince was 8 hours old.

Noodle’s eyes were red from reading in ancient cook books. Tiggie was cross-eyed from measuring a thousand ingredients. And Livingstone was spattered from head to toes with all he’d spilled. But ready, in three separate bowls, were the three potions: Strength, courage, wisdom.

While the others cleaned themselves Noodle measured out several drops from the bowl of strength, He moved that bowl to the floor to show he had used it and then he raced away to the palace.

Tiggie came next and seeing the bowl on the floor he thought Noodle had put it there for him. So he, too, took several drops from the bowl of strength and raced away to the palace.

Then came Livingstone. “Ah,” he said. “They’ve left the last bowl on the floor for me!” Carefully he measured out several drops of strength before he, too, raced off to the palace.

Each little man stole into the palace nursery and sprinkled his magic potion on the sleeping prince. Then, their task done, they met again in the watermelon house.

“What a prince this boy will be!” cried Noodle. “I gave him a truly whopping sprinkling of strength.”

“Strength?” shouted Tigger. “Why I myself gave him from the bowl of strength.”

“Great heavens!” wailed Livingstone. “I did the same!”

Aghast, they stared at one another.

Finally Noodle whispered. “He’ll be the strongest boy in the world!”

“A strong boy with no courage,” groaned Tigger.

“And no wisdom,” cried Livingstone.

And the three little men broke into sobs of grief.

Chapter 2

THE COWARDLY PRINCE

The king of Mitzenpoo named his son Richard. He was so proud of his child he said that he would be the finest prince in the land, the bravest and wisest and strongest.

When he became king no other kingdom would dare to attack them and Mitzenpoo would be peaceful for another 100 years.

But, alas - it was not long before the king found that Richard was not the prince he had hoped for.

As a baby, Richard cried all the time. He awoke crying in the night - he was afraid of the dark. He cried when his father held him - he was afraid of his whiskers. He cried when the nurse sang to him - her voice was loud and frightened him.

“Why always the tears?” complained the king. “Is he ill?”

“I should say not!” laughed the boy’s nurse. “He is the healthiest child I have ever seen. And strong! Why we cannot keep him in rattles. His tiny fingers crush every toy we give him”

“Why, then, is he always afraid?” asked the king.

“He will outgrow it,” said the nurse.

But the boy didn’t outgrow it.

When he was seven he lost a playmate’s football when he gave it a single kick and it sailed high in the air and away over the palace wall.

The playmate turned on Richard and raised his fists in anger.

“I’ll hit you for that!” he cried.

Richard turned white and ran behind his father.

“You’re a prince!” cried the king. “Go out and fight for yourself.”

But when the king stepped aside Richard sat on the ground and cried.

When he was eleven the king gave Richard a red and gold uniform and said that henceforth he would be a captain in the guard. But Richard got sick in his stomach when a sword was placed in his hands. He threw it away with such force that it stuck in the place wall and it took three men to pull it out.

To make matters worse the king feared that the prince was dimwitted as well as cowardly. Not only did he do poorly in his lessons but he did not understand what it meant to be a prince and the future king of Mitzenpoo.

The king said, “My son, I am old. You will soon be king. There are many enemies in the land. How will you protect Mitzenpoo when I am gone?”

“I will leave it to the guard,” said Richard.

“But you must lead them,” protested the king. “And you must guide our people.”

Richard hung his head. “I am afraid of people,” he mumbled.

The king walked away in sorrow. Richard went into the garden and leaned against a holly tree.



“You might ask Santa,” laughed the gardener

“Look out!” said the gardener, who was mean tempered and did not like Richard. “You’re breaking my holly tree!”

Indeed, as Richard leaned lightly against the tree his strength was such that it caused the tree to break.

“Ah,” sighed the prince. “Why am I such a sorrow to my father?”

“Because,” said the mean gardener, “you’ve no brains and you’re cowardly, too, it’s said by all.”

“But I am what I am,” replied Richard. “How can I change?”

“You might ask Santa Claus,” said the gardener jokingly. “Might be he’d put some courage and brains in your Christmas stocking.”

Then the gardener went off laughing hard to think he’d hurt the boy. But Richard wasn’t hurt.

“Perhaps that’s the thing for me to do,” he thought. “Yes, I shall find Santa Claus and ask him for help.”

Chapter 3

RICHARD AND THE CIRCUS

It was late at night when the prince slipped out of his bed. When he had dressed he wrote a letter to the king.

“Dear Father,” he wrote. “I know I make you angry because I am not very bright and I am a coward, people say. So I am going away and I won’t come back until I can be a good prince, wise and brave, the way you want me to be.

When he had finished the letter he climbed out the window and dropped to the ground. It was a very big drop but the prince was so strong and agile it didn’t bother him at all.

What did bother him was the dark. He was so afraid of it that when he had gone only a little way he stopped and crouched under a bush. There he waited, shivering with fright until daylight.

When at last the sun was up he set out again. But he was still very frightened because he had never before been beyond the palace grounds.

“How shall I ever find Santa Claus?” he wondered as he walked through the town. “I don’t even know his address.”

Presently he saw a shopkeeper sweeping the sidewalk in front of his shop.

“Pardon me,” said Richard. “Can you tell me where Santa Claus lives?”

The shopkeeper looked at him in astonishment. “Are you joking me” he asked suspiciously.

“Oh, no.” protested Richard. “I want to see Santa but I don’t know what street he lives on

“Well, son,” said the shopkeeper, “you sound daft to me but all the same I will tell you one thing. Santa Claus doesn’t live on any street around here that I know of.”

“Where then?” persisted Richard.

“Well, somewhere up North, I guess. Around the North Pole, they say.” Then the shopkeeper poked his broom at the boy. “Get going now. I’m tired of your nonsense.”

Richard moved along until he came to a popcorn vendor.

“Pardon me,” said Richard. “Can you tell me where the North Pole is?”

The vendor stared at him before he cried out, “Up North, you dolt. Where else?”

Richard went on until he came to a field where many men were struggling to raise a tent.

“Pardon me,” said Richard to one of the workers “Can you tell me where North is?”

“That way,” said the worker, pointing in the direction of a fat man standing beside an enormous tent pole.

Richard went up to the fat man and asked, “Is that the North Pole?”

“Run along,” snapped the man whose name was Mr. Maxim. “I’ve no time for jokes. This circus opens tonight and it will be hours yet before we can get this tent raised.”

Richard thought perhaps Santa Claus was somewhere under the tent that the men were struggling to raise.

“May I look under the tent?” he asked politely.

“Oh, sure,” said Mr. Maxim mockingly. “Just take this 100-foot pole, stick it under the canvas and raise it.”

Richard picked up the pole as easily as though it had been a walking stick and pushed it under the canvas. He gave one heave and the whole tent was raised and in position.

Mr. Maxim and the other workers stared at Richard.

“Boy!” cried Mr. Maxim at last. “You have a job with this circus! We’ll book you as the strongest boy in the world! We’ll -”

But Richard was disappointed that Santa was not under the tent

“I’d like to help you,” he said, “but I am traveling.”

“Well, boy! We travel!” cried Mr. Maxim. “A circus travels all over the world.”

“I want to go North,” said Richard.

“We go North!” said Mr. Maxim. “We go everywhere!”

“Then,” said Richard eagerly, “I’ll be happy to stay with you until you get to the North Pole.”



“Boy, you have a job with this circus!”

Chapter 4

THE STRONG BOY

That night the circus opened in Mitzenpoo.

First there was the elephant act. Then the trapeze artists. Then the bareback riders.

Finally Mr. Maxim came into the ring. He wore white riding pants and a tail coat. He carried a long black whip.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” he announced. “I now present to you the Strongest boy in the World!”

The band began to play and all the children in the audience cheered and the grownups twisted in their seats to see.

But there was no Strong Boy to be seen.

At the door of the tent Prince Richard cringed behind a seat. “Go on!” cried the lion tamer. “They’re waiting for you!”

Richard clung to the seat. “I don’t dare!”

“Of course you dare!” said the lion tamer giving Richard a shove. “You’re the Strongest Boy in the World!”

The shove sent Richard sprawling into the tent. The band stopped playing and people stared at the boy in astonishment. Richard picked himself up and vent slowly up to Mr. Maxim.

“What shall I do?” he quavered.

“Pick up one of those weights,” whispered Mr. Maxim pointing to a pile of heavy bars. “See how heavy a one you can lift.”

Richard leaned over and picked up a 100-pound bar. Instead of putting it down he laid it over his shoulder and picked up a 200-pound bar. He added this to the one on his shoulder and reached for the 300-pound bar.



The lion tamer urged Richard into the ring

While Mr. Maxim and the crowd looked on in stunned silence Richard added weight after weight to his shoulders.

Finally he had all the weights on his back and he turned to Mr. Maxim and asked, “What shall I lift now?”

Mr. Maxim looked frantically around. There was nothing left for Richard to lift. Mr. Maxim had a desperate idea. “Lift me!” he gasped.

Richard reached out and picked up Mr. Maxim and put him on his shoulder

The crowd stood and cheered. “Hooray! Hooray for the Strongest Boy in the World!”

Then a strange thing happened. A rooster escaped from a clown act and came squawking into the ring. He flew at Richard and pecked at his legs. Richard looked down in horror. He had never seen a rooster in his life. To him it was a baby dragon.

“Help” he screamed.

He began to run round and round the ring carrying the ton of weights on his shoulders and Mr. Maxim on his head. The rooster followed squawking and pecking at his heels while the crowd roared with laughter.

Suddenly Richard dumped Mr. Maxim and the weights from his back and clambered under the seats and out of the tent. He never would have stopped running if Mr. Maxim had not raced after him and caught him on the edge of the circus grounds.

Richard threw himself down. He put his head in his arms and sobbed.

“Boy,” said Mr. Maxim, “what have you to cry about? You’re the best clown this circus has ever had. Why there’s never been anything so funny as a Strong Boy pretending to be afraid of a chicken.”

“I wasn’t pretending,” sobbed Richard. “I was afraid. And I don’t want to be a clown. I only want to get to the North Pole to see Santa Claus.”

The boy is daft, thought Mr. Maxim, but we must keep him with the show.

He said, “The circus spends only one night in each town and each day we’ll be one day closer to the North Pole. Stay with us and well get you where you want to go.”

Richard was ashamed to think of himself as a cowardly clown but to be one was the only way he knew to get to Santa land. So, shivering unhappily, he went back into the tent for the second show.

Chapter 5
KING IGNATZ

Night after night the circus played in a different town and before long Richard was far away from the Kingdom of Mitzenpoo.

Never had he imagined there were so many kingdoms in the world. They traveled through Amapala and Mendooza and the Empire of Vundawa. They played in Helsinberg and Glendarrow and the Kingdom of Ballyshannon. They put on shows in Bacharach and Trinon and the Principality of Kismoor.

Everywhere they went Richard asked, "Is this north? Are we near the North Pole?"

And everywhere the answer was the same, "Not yet. We'll get there by and by."

But the truth of it was they traveled in circles and zigs and zags and if one day they were closer to Santa Land the next day they were farther away.

At last they came to the Kingdom of Ketchikan where the cruel King Ignatz ruled. The people in Keichikan were grim faced and sad eyed and the children never laughed.

Mr. Maxim put up his circus tent but when the time came to start the show there was no one there to see it. So he took Richard and went into the town.

"Why does no one come to the show?" he asked the market men.

"We have no money for shows or fun," replied the market men. "All our money goes for taxes to support the king."

In Mitzenpoo Richard's father had never taxed the people. He gave to the people. He never took from them. So now Richard asked in surprise, "Why does your king need so much money?"

"To pay his soldiers," said the market men. "King Ignatz plans to conquer the whole world. Last year he conquered Rivertania and the year before it was Kressmere. Ketchikan will be a very large kingdom when he finishes."

"Well," said Mr. Maxim, "No one here seems very happy about it."

"We are not happy," said the market men. "We are hungry and cold and we long for laughter. But what can one do?"

"I'll tell you what," said Mr. Maxim. "We'll put on a show free for you. Anyone can come tonight and the cost is nothing."

The market men were delighted. They passed the word to all their neighbors and that night everyone in the town squeezed into the big circus tent.

But just as the elephant act was about to begin there was the sound of shouting outside and King Ignatz and a troop of guards burst into the tent.

"What goes on here?" screamed the king. "Where do the people get the money for circuses and such? All money goes to me, the king!"

"Your majesty," said Mr. Maxim, "the circus is free tonight. We are giving it to amuse your people."

"I do not want my people to be amused," shouted the king. "They are meant only to work and work and work."

He waved his sword angrily and his guards pushed and shoved and carried all the poor people from the tent. When they all had gone King Ignatz sat down and said, "Now amuse me, and if you don't amuse me I'll have all of you locked up."

So the elephants and the trapeze artists and the bareback riders and the clowns and the lion tamer put on their acts for the king.

But all the time, King Ignatz sat stony faced with never a smile and it was easy to see he was not amused.

"Get the Strong Boy!" cried Mr. Maxim to the clowns. "He's our last chance!"

But, alas, Richard, the Strong Boy, was nowhere to be found.



The market men told of cruel King Ignatz

Chapter 6

THE KING IS AMUSED

“Is this all there is to your circus?” demanded King Ignatz. “I have not been amused.”

“There is one more thing, your majesty,” said Mr. Maxim. “Our Strong Boy act.”

“Bring it on, then,” said the king.

But no one could find the Strong Boy for Richard was hiding in a costume trunk in the center of the ring. The sight of King Ignatz waving his sword and the sound of his fierce shouting had so frightened the boy that he had leaped into the trunk.

To hide himself even better he wrapped himself round and round with the costumes in the trunk.

“They’ll never find me!” he whispered to himself.

But he did not know his own strength. The trunk was old and weak and as Richard thrashed about there was a sudden awful creaking and the four sides of the trunk burst open.

There, before the astonished king, stood Richard with a plumed hat on his head, and clown’s mask on his face, and a ballerinas dress draped from his shoulders.

“And who, pray, is this?” demanded the king at last.

“Y-your majesty,” quavered Mr. Maxim, “this is the S-Strongest Boy in the World!”

“Oh!” said King Ignatz, and he began to laugh. “Ho! Ho! Ho!” He threw back his head and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks. “The Strongest Boy in the World!” he cried. “Oh, what a joke!” He pointed at Richard, whose teeth were chattering so that the sound could be heard all over the tent. “That’s the funniest sight I’ve ever seen! I am amused!”

Mr. Maxim and all the circus folk sighed with relief.

“You may go free,” said King Ignatz grandly.

“Thank you, your majesty,” bowed Mr. Maxim.

“Only,” said King Ignatz, “I shall keep your Strong Boy. He will be my jester. He will live with me and amuse me.”

“But, your majesty,” protested Mr. Maxim. “He’s only a dim-witted boy and -”

“Good.” said the king. “He will not dare to match wits with me. Come, now. Leave my kingdom but leave the boy behind.”

He waved his sword and his guards surrounded Richard and marched him to the king’s palace. It was a place of dreadful gloom. It was surrounded by 20 foot walls and a moat. Every window was barred and every other door led to a dungeon cell.

“Now, boy,” said King Ignatz, “you are to make me laugh whenever I say. I often need to be cheered.”

“I’m sure you do,” said Richard timidly.

“Why so?” demanded the king in surprise.

“Because your palace is so gloomy,” said Richard.



The king roared at Richard’s strange attire

“It’s the finest money can buy.” thundered the king “What would you know about palaces anyway?”

“I have been in a palace,” murmured Richard.

Ignatz guffawed. “Oh you do make me laugh. You’ve never been in a palace except in your dreams.”

“All the same,” said Richard, “a palace should be bright and splendid with gardens around it and happy people everywhere.”

“What nonsense!” cried Ignatz. “A king who treats his people to happiness is a weak king. I am the greatest king in the land and I am going to conquer all the world. Tomorrow I am setting out to conquer the kingdom of Mitzenpoo.”

“Mitzenpoo!” gasped Richard.

“Yes. By Christmas day the king of Mitzenpoo will be at my feet.”

Richard’s face turned white and his heart pounded and suddenly he himself fell in a faint at Ignatz’ feet.

Chapter 7

RICARD'S PLAN

That night Richard lay awake on his cot in King Ignatz's dressing room.

"What shall I do?" he cried to himself. "This wicked king is going to attack Mitzenpoo and conquer my father and there's no one to stop him. If only I were brave and wise I'd stop him!"

Then he thought, "The king is asleep now. He can't hurt me when he is asleep. I'll capture him now!"

He slipped off the cot and into the king's bedroom. Ignatz snored so loudly the windows rattled. For a moment Richard was too frightened to move.

"But he's asleep," he reminded himself. "I'm safe while he's asleep."

He leaned far over the bed. His heart thumped with fear. Slowly he reached out and caught the ends of the soft feather mattress. Then, in one quick movement, he rolled up the mattress with blankets, sheets, pillows and King Ignatz inside.

He lifted the immense bundle to his shoulder and ran out of the room.

"Stop!" cried a guard. "What are you doing?"

"I'm - I'm taking the king for a walk," stammered Richard.

The guard's eyes popped. Then he laughed. "Oh what a jester you are! Is that the kind of joke that amuses the king?"

"I - I think so," said Richard as he edged away. The load on his back was beginning to stir. He hurried to the top of the great staircase in the center hall. But just as he began to descend there was a muffled rumble from inside the mattress and then a giant roar!

"Put me down! Put me down!" Richard's heart sank and his knees turned to jelly. Obediently he dropped his load.

Down the broad stairs rolled the mattress and out of the mattress rolled King Ignatz.

There were a hundred steps and King Ignatz whacked each one as he rolled to the bottom. Finally he came to a stop. For an instant he lay there while horrified guards rushed to his aid.

The king got up and glared at Richard who stood rooted to the spot at the top of the stairs.

"We'll get him, your majesty," cried one of the guards as he drew his sword.

"I'll get him," snarled the king.

The guards backed away and King Ignatz started up the stairs. One by one he climbed the hundred steps and all the time his eyes bored into Richard's eyes and the boy grew weaker and weaker.

Ninety-five, 96, 97 - the king placed his foot on the 98th step and reached out his hands. At that very moment Richard collapsed. He sank in a limp heap over the balustrade and zoomed down the railing to the bottom of the stairs.



Richard swung high over the guards' heads

Ignatz clutched at the empty air and roared. He started back down the steps as Richard jumped to his feet. The prince took one frightened look at the king and then ran across the hall and leaped to the top of the immense mantle piece. There he stood and gazed down at the king.

"Ladder! Get me a ladder!" screamed the king. "Stand back!"

A ladder was brought and laid against the fireplace. Ignatz began to climb. Richard was cornered. His eyes rolled in his head. Suddenly he saw the giant chandelier holding hundreds of candles suspended from the ceiling.

He threw himself out from the mantle and caught the bottom of the chandelier. For an instant he swung there and then the chandelier with all its lights crashed to the floor.

The king and the guards dashed wildly about stamping out the candles. In the confusion Richard scurried away on his hands and knees.

Chapter 8

THE OLD WOMAN

When the chandelier fell there was terrible confusion in the palace. A dozen fires were started, and when they were put out there was nothing but darkness.

The king and his guards lay about groaning and nursing their burns and bruises.

No one noticed that Richard had slipped out of the hall.

The prince ran to the great wall and the gate barred with iron. He reached out and with one easy pull, bent the bars and squeezed through the gate. Now he stood by the drawbridge which was raised above the deep moat surrounding the palace.

"I'll never cross that!" moaned Richard.

He kicked unhappily at the heavy chain that held the drawbridge. Instantly the chain snapped in two and the bridge came screeching down.

Richard ran across. He ran on and on. He was too afraid of what lay behind him to be afraid of the dark unknown ahead.

He ran through fields and woods. He ran all through the night. When it was morning he slumped down on a log in a forest. He put his head down on his knees. He thought he might as well stay there and die because he'd been a failure all his life and he would never get to Santa Claus for help.

Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder. He threw up his arms in terror. But it was only an old woman who stood beside him. She was holding an ax.

"Come, lad," she said. "Let me help you."

"Oh," blurted Richard, "if only you could! I must get to Santa Claus. Can you show me the way?"



He ran through the woods the entire night

"Santa Claus!" cried the old woman. "Why, children don't go to Santa Claus, son. He comes to you. By and by it will be Christmas and if you've been a good boy Santa will bring you all you ask for. You must be patient and wait."

"I can't wait!" protested Richard. "I must see him now!"

"What is it you want so badly?" asked the old woman.

"Wisdom and courage," whispered Richard.

The old woman stared unbelievably at him.

"You see," explained Richard. "I am a prince but I am not a proper prince for I am always afraid and I am stupid. King Ignatz plans to conquer my father's kingdom and I don't know how to save it." He swallowed hard and finished in a small voice. "They say Santa Claus can do anything so I thought perhaps he would help me."

The old woman thought a while. "Then she said, "Over in the next forest there is someone who talks to witches and goblins. Perhaps she could tell you how to get to Santa Claus."

"Oh, take me to her," begged Richard.

"Alas, I can't. I must chop kindling wood. It is my job and King Ignatz says he will hang anyone in the kingdom who doesn't do his job."

"How much wood must you chop?" asked Richard.

"Every day I must fill three bushel baskets. It is very hard for one like me and takes me from dawn to dark."

"I'll do it!" cried Richard.

He snatched the ax from the old woman's hands and swung at the nearest tree. In one stroke it was down and in a few more strokes it was chopped to kindling wood.

Richard ran to another tree. In a few minutes he had felled a dozen trees and split them into little pieces.

The amazed old woman clasped Richard's arm. "That's enough for 200 baskets. "I'll not have to work again for months. Come now and I will take you to the one who talks to witches."

Richard threw down the ax and followed the old woman through the forest.

Chapter 9

THE OLD, OLD WOMAN

Richard and the old woman arrived at a lonely little house in a neighboring forest.

“This is the house of one who talks to witches,” said the old woman. “I’ll leave you here to see her alone.”

Before Richard could protest the woman darted away. Richard turned and timidly knocked at the door of the little house. There was no answer and Richard knocked again. This time he knocked harder and the door crashed open.

He fell back in alarm as the witch woman appeared in the doorway. The old woman had been old but the witch woman was twice as old. Her hands were twisted bones. Her cheeks sagged. Her eyes were little black holes sunk in her head.

“What is all this whamming, clanging noise out here?” she creaked.

“Oh, ma’am,” said Richard. “Can you show me the way to Santa Land?”

“What!” snorted the old, old woman. “How should I know such a thing? Who are you anyway and where do you come from?”

“I - I am a prince,” stammered Richard. “And I must get to Santa Claus to save my father’s kingdom. They say you talk to witches and goblins and I - I thought they might tell you the way for me to go.”

The old, old woman shook her head. “Neither witch nor goblin has visited me for a long, long time. This forest has become too busy a place for them to come.”



“What is this whamming, clanging noise?”

She wiped her eyes with the edge of her apron. “I miss them,” she sniffed. “Oh, I am so lonely without my witch and goblin friends.”

“But where are they?” cried Richard. “Where do they stay?”

The old, old woman motioned toward the far away mountains. “Over there, I expect. It’s a lonely place where no man has ever set foot. That’s the sort of place witches and goblins like. Oh, if only my house were there!”

“If I move your house there, will you ask them for me the way to Santa Land?” asked Richard.

“What?” cried the old, old woman in astonishment.

“Will you?” insisted Richard. “Will you?”

The old, old woman nodded her head in a puzzled way. She was too amazed to speak.

Richard crawled under the house. He bent his knees and put his back against the bottom of the house. He pushed and pushed and pushed.

His face turned red and the perspiration ran down his back. The old, old woman shook her head. “The boy’s daft,” she muttered. “He’s out of his head.”

But even as she spoke there was a ripping noise and Richard was standing there with the house on his shoulders.

The old, old woman gasped. Then she hobbled away through the forest. “This way,” she croaked. “This way.” Richard staggered after her.

It was a long way and it took all day, but when evening came the old, old woman stopped and said, “Here. Here is a place they’re bound to be.”

Richard looked around and he thought that indeed it was a place surely meant for witches and goblins. It was high on a rocky mountain side. There were black caves in the sides of the mountain and rocks piled into eerie shapes as if giants had been playing blocks there.

Richard set down the house and the old, old woman rushed in and began to put things to rights.

“Will they come?” asked Richard anxiously.

“They’ll come tonight,” she said “I’m certain of it.”

She built a fire and sat down at the hearth. “Come now. We’ll sit here and wait.”

But hardly had Richard sunk down beside her when there was a swishing down the chimney and a flash of lightening in the window and a scratching at the door, and Richard knew the witches had come.

Chapter 10

THE UNDERGROUND WHEELBARROW

When the scratching came at the door Richard hid in the corner. But the old, old woman said, "I told you they'd come!" and she hobbled across the room and threw open the door.

In came a young woman dressed in black. She ran her fingers through her hair and streaks of lightning flashed around her head. Her hands were very white with nails six inches long.

"Greetings!" she cried to the old, old woman.

"I'm so glad to see you." said the old, old woman. "I've been so lonesome for you and your family."

"How did you ever get your house here?" asked the witch.

The old, old woman motioned to the corner where Richard stood staring fearfully at the witch. "This boy brought my house here on his back. In return I've promised you'd tell him the way to Santa Land."

"Santa Land! I've never been there. It's much too cold for me."

"But do you know the way?"

"Sampam, the goblin, runs an underground wheelbarrow," said the witch. "It goes from Fairy Land to Santa Land to Nursery Story Land three times a day."

Richard crept out of his corner. "Can I get on it?" he asked timidly.

"I don't see how" said the "It runs 200 feet under. You could never get so far down even though I happen to know it runs directly under this house."

"I could dig down!" declared Richard.

"Ha!" scoffed the witch. "It would take 10 giants to dig that far. How could a shivering thing like you do it?"

"Let him try." said the old, old woman, She took Richard into the kitchen and gave him a spade. He went out and gently picked up the house and moved it 20 yards away. Then he began to dig.

Before long he had dug a hole so deep he couldn't see the top. Suddenly he heard a rumbling and the earth around him shook. "It's caving in!" he screamed.

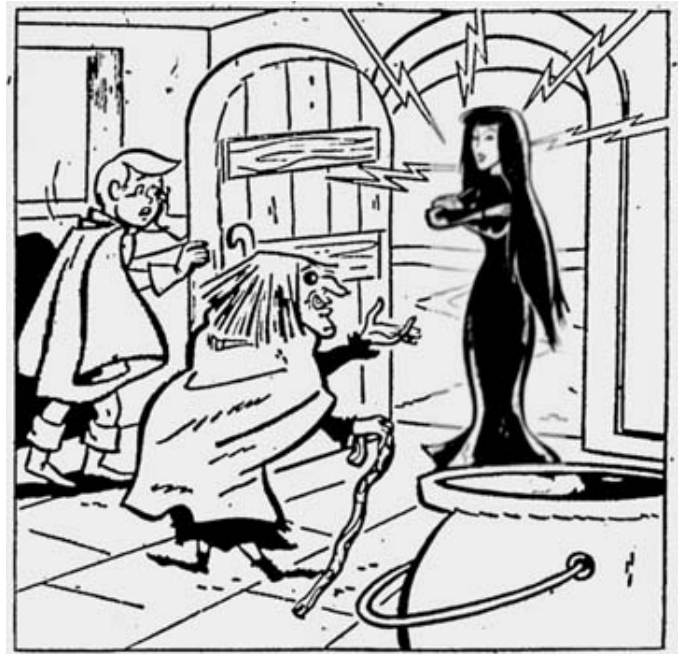
"No!" shouted the witch from the top of the hole. "It's Sampam's wheelbarrow. You're almost there."

Richard gave one more heave with the shovel and the wall of the hole opened up. He found himself in a large tunnel lighted with lanterns. As he stood there the rumbling noise grew louder and louder until finally, with a mighty roar, a giant wheelbarrow came into view.

In the wheelbarrow sat a girl and a boy and pushing the barrow was a fat little goblin. This was Sampam.

"Hop in." he said to Richard. "Where are you going?"

"To Santa Land" quavered Richard.



Lightning flashed about the young witch

"That's our next stop." said Sampam. "Move over kids. This is Miss Muffet and Mr. Simon. They're going to a party in the Land of Oz."

Richard climbed in and Sampam picked up the handles of the wheelbarrow and charged down the tunnel.

"Why are you going to Santa Land?" asked Miss Muffet.

"I am neither brave nor smart," said Richard shyly. "And I thought Santa would help me."

"Shucks." said Mr. Simon. "I'm not smart either. I once went fishing in a rain barrel."

"And I'm not brave," said Miss Muffet. "Even spiders frighten me."

Richard looked at them in astonishment. It was the first time he'd known that there were other children in the world neither brave nor Wise. He wished he could stay as he was and be with these wonderful friends forever.

"But," he thought, "after all. I am a prince and I must save my father's kingdom."

Just then Sampam cried out "Hold on! We're coming into Santa Land!"

Chapter 11

PATRICK TWEEDLEKNEES

The wheelbarrow rolled to a stop. Sampam dropped the handle's.

"Here we are. This is Santa Land."

Richard looked around. They were in a small lighted cave. "W-where is Santa Claus?" he stammered.

"Up those steps, I expect," said Sampam. He pointed to a narrow winding staircase. "Now run along, son, and I hope Santa gives you what you want."

Richard climbed out of the wheelbarrow and waved to his new friends. "Good-by," he said wistfully.

"Good-by," shouted Mr. Simon. "Don't you worry about being dumb and scared. We like you the way you are."

Richard turned and started up the stairs. Round and round and round went the stairs. His head began to whirl as he climbed. Up, up. Round, round. Presently he felt that he wasn't climbing but that he was walking on a cloud.

Suddenly the stairs ended and Richard found that he was standing in the middle of a great white cloud. He saw a little white house sitting on the cloud. As he walked toward the house the cloud felt cold to his feet. Suddenly some more cloud began dropping on his head and getting in his eyes.

He was terrified. He thought it was the end of the world. He began to run toward the white house. As he ran he cried, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!"

An elf dressed in red with crooked legs burst from the house. He stared at the sky and then at Richard. "Dunce!" he roared. "Have you never seen snow before?"

Richard stopped and looked around him. He turned red with shame. The cloud he thought he walked on was simply a land of snow stretching as far as the eye could see. And the bits of cloud falling on his head were flakes of never-ending snow.

"What a stupid you are!" cried the elf.

Richard nodded dumbly. He did not tell the elf how dizzy he had become on the stairs so that he thought he had been walking on a cloud.

"You are a coward," grumbled the elf.

Richard nodded. His eyes began to fill with tears. He had not expected Santa Claus to be like this. He turned away in despair.

Suddenly there was a shout from the house. Richard looked up and there was Santa Claus, the real, true, no mistake Santa Claus coming down the steps.

He was round and red and beaming and Richard's heart filled with joy at the sight of him. Santa came down and put his arm around Richard's shoulder and then he turned to the elf.

"Patrick Tweedleknées, I heard everything you said to this boy. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for treating a visitor that way."



"The sky is falling," shouted Richard

Richard hung his head. "It's true. I am dumb and I am a coward."

"Then this is no place for you," scoffed Patrick Tweedleknées. "Go back where you came from."

"Tweedleknées, be quiet?" thundered Santa Claus. He turned to Richard. "You mustn't mind Tweedleknées. He makes a big noise but never means half he says."

He led Richard into his warm little house and sat down with him by the fire. Tweedleknées slumped glumly in a corner.

"Now tell me," said Santa. "Who are you and why are you here?"

"I am Richard, Prince of Mitzenpoo. It is said that you give boys and girls whatever they most desire."

"That is true. So what can I give to you?"

"C-courage and w-wisdom," faltered Richard.

For a long moment there was silence. Then Santa slowly shook his head.

"I am sorry but those things I cannot give."

Richard's heart sank and he thought, "Now, all is lost."

Chapter 12

THE GREEN GHOUL

Santa told Richard he could not give him courage or wisdom.

“But you can do anything!” protested Richard. “Once I wanted blue kitten more than anything in the world. There wasn’t one to be found in the whole kingdom but on Christmas Eve you left one in my stocking.”

“Yes,” said Santa. “I can give you bicycles and books and skates, pets and games and any sort of toy. But courage and wisdom I cannot give.”

“Please, please!” begged Rich “Help me or my father is lost!”

Santa put his hand over his eyes and thought for a long while.

At last he said, “Perhaps it can be done if you will bring to me two things I ask of you.”

“Name them!” cried Richard.

“First,” said Santa, ‘bring me a spool of golden thread.’”

“I will.” declared Richard. “Where do I find it?”

“In the sewing box of the Green Ghoul.”

“Ha!” scoffed Tweedleknees from the corner. “He’d never dare!”

“Will you get it?” asked Santa looking at Richard.

“Who is the Green Ghoul?”

“A creature with a hundred arms,” cried Tweedleknees. “A creature who collects boy’s ears to decorate her gowns. She lives in a tree house on the edge of Santa Land. When she is angry she lets out her breath and a hurricane blows across the whole earth.”

Richard shuddered and turned white. “I am afraid,” he moaned.

“I told you he wouldn’t go!” cried Tweedleknees.

Richard dragged his feet to the door. “I am going,” he whispered. “W-will you be kind enough to point the way?”

Santa took Richard to the door and pointed across the land. “Just keep going until you come to the Giant Tree.”

Richard sighed and trudged away in a straight line the way Santa had pointed. He thought he must have walked a hundred miles before finally he came upon an enormous tree standing all alone in a field of snow.

The giant branches of the tree waved back and forth against the sky. In the midst of the branches was a tiny house.

“Woooo” went the wind around the tree and the branches bent and swayed and swooped towards the boy as he stood trembling beneath them.

Shaking with fright he climbed up to the little house and knocked at the door. Instantly it opened and before Richard’s horrified eyes stood a green faced creature three feet tall. While she held open the door with two hands she sewed on a skirt with two others. Another arm was raised above Richard and still another slowly crept around his feet.

“Ah,” said the Green Ghoul gazing at Richard’s ear’s, “I’ve been needing more ears to decorate my skirt!” Three hands began to twist at Richard’s ears.

With a gasp of terror he pulled away and started to climb into the branches of the tree. Then he discovered they were not branches but arms - a hundred more arms of the Green Ghoul!

They swept around him and gathered him up and carried him back into the tree house.

Richard was about to shut his eyes and give up when he saw something shining in the pocket of the Ghoul’s apron. It was the spool of golden thread.

“I will get it! I will!” thought Richard. With a mighty effort he twisted from the arms of the Ghoul reached into her pocket and pulled out the thread,

Instantly the Ghoul wrapped all her hundred arms around him and crushed him to her.



Many green arms reached out for Richard

Chapter 13

THE BLACK DIAMOND

Richard struggled in the many arms of the Green Ghoul. Using all his strength, he twisted back the arts that held him. But it was no use.

When he freed himself from two arms a dozen more took their place.

He bent back one, broke another, twisted a third. Still the arms crushed him. It was impossible to escape and all Richard's strength was useless.

Suddenly he got an idea. He thought, "Breaking away from each arm does no good. What I must do is strike at the Ghoul herself. If I conquer her I will, at the same time, conquer the hundred arms."

It was the first time in his life he had ever thought his way out of trouble. He felt happy and unafraid.

He took a big breath and punched his head into the stomach of the Green Ghoul. The mighty blow knocked the breath out of the creature and all arms collapsed.

Richard leaped away. He ran from the house and jumped to the ground. By the time the Ghoul recovered her breath Richard was a mile away. The Green Ghoul let out a roar of anger, a roar so powerful it caused a giant wind sweep across the whole world.

But the wind only helped to carry Richard on his way and the roar didn't frighten him for he was far beyond the reach of the hundred arms

On and on Richard ran, never tiring, until at last he came to Santa's house.

"I did It!" he cried as he burst through the door. "I brought you the thread!"



"You have done a good job," said Santa

He put the spool of golden thread on Santa's desk and then he stood there happier and prouder than he had ever been in his life.

"You have done a good job," said Santa.

"Where Is Patrick Tweedleknies?" asked Richard. "I would like him to know."

"He'll be along presently," said Santa. "In the meantime you come with me."

He took Richard into the kitchen and there on the table were platters of doughnuts and ginger cookies and lemon pie. There was a big white pitcher filled with chocolate milk shake and a blue pitcher filled with cherry pop.

Richard reached for a piece of lemon pie. But at that very moment Patrick Tweedleknies came into the room.

"I did it!" said Richard. "I brought Santa the golden thread."

"So I heard," snapped Tweedleknies. "But remember Santa said you must bring him two things and a coward like you will never get the second."

Richard put down the piece of lemon pie. "W-what is the second thing I must bring?"

"Now," said Santa, "you must bring to me a black diamond."

"A-and where will I find such a diamond?"

"From the third finger of the Phantom of the Sea."

"W-who is the Phantom of the Sea?" faltered Richard.

"Who knows?" cried Tweedleknies. "He has never been seen by any living creature. That is why he is called the Phantom."

"Then how do you know there is such a thing?" asked Richard. "And how do you know he wears a black diamond on his finger?"

"People have seen his giant footprints by the side of the sea. They have heard his screams at night. And though they could not see his hands they could see and feel the he black diamond on his finger."

Richard's heart sank and all his old fears came flooding back. He thought he could not bear to meet the Phantom of the Sea.

Chapter 14
THE PHANTOM

Richard was no longer happy. The very thought of the Phantom of the Sea caused his knees to tremble and his heart to pound.

“It will take a smart, brave boy to bring back that diamond,” taunted Patrick Tweedleknives, “and anyone can plainly see you’re dumb and scared. Better go back where you came from and play with rubber balloons like the baby you are.”

He tossed an unfilled balloon at the boy. Richard picked it up and put it in his pocket. He swallowed hard and turned to Santa. “I guess I’ll be going,” he mumbled.

“I told you so!” shouted Tweedleknives.

“I am going to get the black diamond,” went on Richard unhappily. “Please tell me the way.”

Santa smiled. “Go into the setting sun until you come to a red sea. That is where the Phantom lives.”

Richard did as he was told. For two days and a night he trudged westward. Late in the afternoon of the second day he saw ahead of him a great sea whose waters boiled red under the setting sun.

As he came closer the sun sank lower and lower. At last it dropped into the red sea and all the land was black.

Richard stood trembling in the dark. The water churned at his feet. Suddenly a voice bawled out of the dark.

“Who are you and why have you come to my sea?”

The Phantom voice blared again. “Speak! I command you!”

Richard opened his mouth. “I am Prince Richard,” he said in a very small voice. “I have come to see the black diamond on your finger.”

“That is an evil errand,” howled the Phantom. “You shall suffer for having thought of it.”

Richard felt a warm breath against his face. He threw out his hands and felt the slimy body of the Phantom. He twisted back the Phantom’s arm and held him locked in his grip. He caught the Phantom’s hand and felt the diamond on the third finger.

But even as he began to draw off the diamond the sea boiled up and the waves rolled in and swept him off his feet. He tried to let go of the Phantom but he was locked against him and dragged into the sea.

He gasped for breath. The water swept into his mouth. His eyes bulged.

Then suddenly he was free from the Phantom.

He opened his eyes and found himself in a red palace deep in the sea. Though he was under water he could breathe and see.

At the end of the hall he saw a creature on a red throne. He knew it was the Phantom.

He looked at Richard. “Never before,” said he, “has anyone twisted the arm of the Phantom. As a punishment I sentence you to spend the rest of your days in this palace under the sea!”



He found himself in an underwater palace

Chapter 15

THE STRUGGLE

Richard ran to the window of the palace. "I can get away!" he thought. "I can swim to the top."

But the Phantom read his thoughts. "You could never get to the top without my flippers," he laughed. "You'd drown first."

Richard sank down on the floor and put his head in his hands. "Now it is really all over," he thought. "I shall never get back to Mitzenpoo and my father will perish."

"It's a strange thing," smirked the Phantom. "You can't breathe in water and I can't breathe in air. This red sea palace is the only place on earth where we both can live."

Richard raised his head. Was it true? Would the Phantom perish if he were long out of water?

Richard began to think and plan. A dozen ideas flew through his mind. He was filled with joy to know that when he tried he could use his head as well as anyone.

He waited until the Phantom sat down to dinner. Then he pulled out of his pocket the rubber balloon Patrick Tweedleknives had thrown at him. He stood behind the Phantom and blew up the balloon.

He blew and blew. The balloon grew larger and larger. Presently it was three feet around.

"What are you huffing and puffing about?" demanded the Phantom.

"I am hungry," said Richard.

"You may eat when I have finished," said the Phantom as he shoveled fish into his mouth.

"I am hungry now," said Richard. As he spoke he suddenly held wide the mouth of the balloon and jerked it down over the Phantom's head and shoulders. Now the Phantom was cut off from water. His head was surrounded by the air Richard had blown into the balloon.

"Let go! Let go!" roared the Phantom from inside the balloon.

But Richard held the balloon firmly in place. He wrapped his legs around the Phantom's waist pinning his arms to his side. The Phantom struggled and screamed but Richard held on.

Presently the struggles grew weaker and the screams died away. The Phantom lay limp on the table.

Richard let go the balloon. He snatched off the Phantom's flippers and put them on his own feet. Then he tore the black diamond from the Phantom's finger and put it on his own.

The Phantom groaned weakly as Richard rushed out of the palace door. The sea churned around the prince. He gave a mighty kick with the flippers and shot upward. Again and again he kicked but still he did not reach the top.

His breath gave out and the ringing began in his ears. With his last bit of strength he gave one more kick and suddenly his head was out of water and he was safe.



Wearing the Phantom's flippers, he swam to the surface

He left the flippers by the side of the dreadful sea and sped eastward to Santa Land.

Santa was sitting at his fireside when Richard returned.

"There," said Richard as he laid the black diamond in Santa's hands. "I've brought you the golden thread and I've brought you the black diamond. Now give me courage and wisdom so that I may be a proper prince and save my father's kingdom."

He stood very straight and proud before Santa. His head was high and his eyes were shining.

But Santa looked at him and shook his head. "No," he said. "I cannot give these things to you."

"But - you promised!" cried Richard.

Santa smiled. "How can I give you what you already have?"

Richard's mouth fell open in surprise. But before he could speak the door crashed open and Patrick Tweedleknives staggered into the room.

"What a boy!" he gasped. "What a prince! Never has his like been seen before!"

With that the crooked legged dwarf fell in an exhausted heap at Richard's feet.

Chapter 16
SANTA LAND

“What does it all mean?” asked Richard in confusion. “Why do you say I am already brave and wise? I got the things you asked for but I was afraid all the time.”

“It is a wise man who knows when to be afraid,” said Santa. “And it’s a very brave man in deed who goes forward when he would far rather turn and run.”

“You mean, then, that I am now a truly proper prince?”

“You are,” smiled Santa. “And I shall give you two gifts to help you remember always the proper prince you are.”

He took the golden thread Richard had brought him from the green Ghoul. He wove a ring with it and placed it on Richard’s finger.

“Wear this and wisdom will always be yours.”

Then he plucked the black diamond from the Phantom’s ring and set it in the handle of a silver dagger.

“Carry this and never be afraid again.”

Patrick Tweedleknees sat up on the floor. “As for strength” said he, “You’re already the strongest creature on earth. I ought to know.”

“How do you know?” asked the prince.

Santa laughed and put his arm around Richard’s shoulders.

“Tweedleknees was both the Green Ghoul and the Phantom of the Sea,” he told the astonished boy. “You see, he can change his shape at will and so he made himself into those awful creatures in order to test you.”

“What a prince!” repeated Tweedleknees and collapsed again on the floor.

“Now,” said Santa. “Let us go to the workshops for tomorrow is Christmas Eve and there is much work to be done.”

“Christmas Eve!” exclaimed Richard. “King Ignatz of Ketchikan swore to conquer my father’s kingdom by Christmas day. I-I must hurry back to my own land at once!”

“I have thought of that,” said Santa. “Word has come to me that there is no joy in Mitzenpoo this Christmas season. King Ignatz is indeed at the gates. The people are in distress and not one child in Mitzenpoo will hang a stocking tomorrow night.”

“I shall fly!” cried Richard.

“Wait and fly with me,” said Santa. “Now, while I see to the loading of the sleigh you go to the toy shops. For the rest of your life you will be prince and king. Tonight be just a boy.”

Richard gladly did as Santa told him and went off with Tweedleknees. What a fairy land of toys he found in the toy shop!

Joyfully he climbed on a red bicycle and with Tweedleknees on the handlebars whizzed round and round the shop. Then he tried out an enormous harmonica. Tweedleknees stomped and sang and Richard played a merry jig.

Then they took a speed sled out into the snow and zoomed down the highest hills, shouting and laughing all the way.

They returned to the shop in time for supper of blueberry pie, molasses cookies and coconut cake.

After that they played checkers and dominoes and tick-tack-toe. They threw darts and slid down bamboo slides and shot toy arrows at toy targets.

So the hours sped by and suddenly it was Christmas Eve and time to go.

With a sigh Richard left the toys. He and Santa climbed into Santa’s loaded sleigh.

“Good-by, prince!” shouted Tweedleknees. “Come again!”

“I will,” promised Richard.

But he knew in his heart he never would because forever after he would have to be a proper prince of Mitzenpoo.



Richard and Tweedleknees played with the toys

Chapter 17

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

Santa and Richard sped through the cold, silent night. On and on they went above the sleeping world until they came to the Kingdom of Mitzenpoo.

Richard peered over the side of the sleigh. He saw his father's palace with a light shining from every window. In the courtyard the people of Mitzenpoo huddled while a hoard of foreign soldiers battered at the gates.

"I'm coming!" shouted the prince. But no one looked up or seemed to hear.

"We are invisible as long as we are in the sleigh," said Santa. "No one can see or hear us on the sleigh until I crack my whip. Hang on, now, we are going down."

Gently the reindeer brought the sleigh to a halt on the palace roof. Richard leaped out and climbed down the sides of the palace wall to the courtyard below.

"Everything will be all right!" he shouted to the people huddled in the corners. "Don't be afraid!"

The people looked at him in astonishment. "Who is it?" they asked among themselves and Richard heard others answer, "It's the coward prince come back too late. What good is he to Mitzenpoo?"

Richard rushed into the palace. He found his father sitting at his desk surrounded by his guards. The king's face was grey with cares and grief. His hand shook as he signed a paper before him on the desk.

"Father, father! I am here!"

The old king stared at Richard in sorrow. "So you are back," he whispered. "Ah, poor wretch. You cannot help what you are but things would have been different if only you had been a proper prince - wise and brave and strong."

"Now I am dying and there is no one else to lead our soldiers or save our people. I surrender now to Ignatz of Ketchikan who hence forth will rule in Mitzenpoo."

"Never!" cried Richard. He snatched up the paper and tore it into pieces. Then he drew his back diamond dagger and turned towards the guards.

"Follow me!"

The astonished guards followed him as he charged out of the palace and the people, seeing him, took up sticks and rushed along behind the guards.

Richard threw open the gate and faced King Ignatz and the soldiers of Ketchikan.

"Leave our land or surrender!" cried Richard.

Ignatz stared and burst into laughter. "It's the strong boy himself!" he cried. "The half-wit of the circus!"

He rushed forward with his spear but Richard stood his ground and knocked Ignatz to the ground with one swing of his strong arm. The guards and people of Mitzenpoo cheered madly and set upon the soldiers of Ketchikan who fled in dismay when

they saw their king on the ground. Ignatz and his men were defeated and never bothered Mitzenpoo or any other kingdom again.

Then the people lifted Richard to their shoulders and carried him in to the king. The old man wept and embraced his son. "Now I can die in peace," he whispered. "For, in you, Mitzenpoo will have a mighty king."

Suddenly there was the crack of a whip and the sound of sleigh bells tinkling. The people rushed to the window.

"It's Santa! Look! Look! It's Santa himself whom we've never seen before!"

Richard climbed on a table and peered over their shoulders.

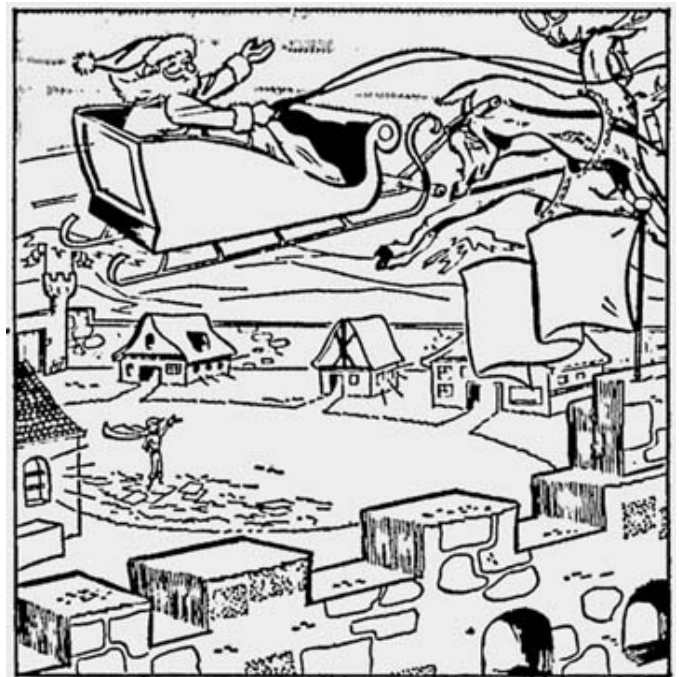
Sure enough, there was Santa's sleigh in the courtyard below and there was Santa himself emptying a giant bag of gifts for the people of Mitzenpoo.

When the sack was empty Santa cracked his whip again and the sleigh rose into the air.

"Merry Christmas!" cried Santa as he sailed away.

And far below, Richard of Mitzenpoo, whispered softly, "Merry Christmas, dear Santa. Merry Christmas to all"

The End



"Merry Christmas!" cried Santa as he sailed away

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