



Santa and the Boy Fish

By Lucrece Hudgins Beale

Chapter 1

THE LUCKY FIND

Once upon a time, in a little village by a faraway sea, there lived a boy named Michael McBurney.

His father was a fisherman but times were hard. There were many other fishermen in the little village and not many buyers of fish could be found. Michael's mother mended nets to earn a few extra pennies and the family just managed to get along.

Michael did not mind being poor. His one great love was the sea and that was free. Every day he played in the water that lapped the village shores. He swam and rowed and skipped stones. He fished and searched for shells. All these things cost him nothing and he was very happy.

But he was happiest of all when he sat on the rocky cliffs above the village and stared across the sea, listening to secret sounds no one else could hear and seeing strange things no one else could see.

This may sound impossible but it was true nevertheless. Things often happened to Michael that no one, not even his mother, would ever believe. Yet, when people scoffed at his stories, there was always something they couldn't explain.

For instance, one stormy night, Michael was awakened from a deep sleep. He heard the wind racing around the eaves and the rain thrashing against the window panes. He snuggled deeper in the covers and was almost asleep again when suddenly he heard a cloppety-clop, cloppety-clop right over his head!

He sat up in bed and his mouth fell open as he strained to hear. There it was again - cloppety-clop, cloppety-clop - clear as could be.

Michael tore from his bed and raced to his parents' room.

"There's a horse! A horse on the roof!"

His father was angry at being awakened and his mother told Michael it was a dream and sent him back to bed. But the next morning he still insisted it had been so and when he went outside he found a horse shoe lying at the door.

Triumphantly he carried the shoe to his parents crying "Look! I told you. I told you?"

Still his father scoffed "It was probably thrown there by someone from the road. Forget it now - it's just another of your wild ideas." But there was a look of wonder in the old fisherman's eyes as he turned away from his son.

No one had believed Michael either when he swore he had heard a fish playing a mouth harp in the sea and seen a bird flying a kite that had been caught for three weeks in a tree. Still people couldn't explain how a mouth harp had been found later on the beach nor why the kite that had been so long in the tree was no longer there.

Michael spent more and more time by himself on the beach. He longed to know what lay beneath the surface of the sea. When he opened his eyes under water he could see nothing, yet he was sure that marvelous things were there if only he could swim deep enough and see clearly enough to find them.

Then one day a wonderful thing happened. When he went to his usual place on the cliff above the village he found a diving mask and a pair of rubber flippers lying on the rocks.

"Where had they come from?" wondered Michael. "Who in the village would be rich enough to own such things?"

Suddenly, snatching up his find, Michael rushed down to the shore. He slipped the flippers on his feet. He fitted the mask over his face. Then, his heart racing with excitement, he slipped into the water to find the wonderful kingdom he knew must be there.



Michael heard secret sounds from the sea

Chapter 2
UNDER THE SEA

Michael put his face down in the ocean and opened his eyes. The diving mask left an air space between his eyes and the sea so that he could see almost as well under water as above.

He wiggled the flippers on his feet. They looked like huge frog feet waving under his chin. He held his hand in front of his face. It was a giant's hand and seemed not to belong to Michael at all.

He pulled his head from the water and took a great lungful of air. Then he gave a mighty kick with the flippers and shot down into the silent, secret world below.

He cried out with pleasure at what he saw but as soon as he opened his mouth he choked on a swallow of water and had to return to the surface for more air. This time he was careful to keep his mouth closed as he glided back down a path of reflected light to the ocean floor.

He felt he was flying, not swimming, in a sea of changing colors. The water shimmered with reds and blues and yellows. Gaudy forests of seaweed danced beneath him. Strange and wonderfully colored fish darted about. They did not seem to mind having Michael there at all. To them he was just another fish.

A fat creature with popping eyes and a mouth as wide as its plump body swam lazily up and stared curiously into Michael's mask. Michael reached out to touch it but to his surprise the pop-eyed fish was out of his reach. Through the mask everything looked not only larger but closer than it really was.

A fish with a head like a horse and a long pipe of a body darted between Michael's legs and made a sound like a trumpet as it disappeared.

A school of flappy-tailed creatures with wings on their bodies swam 'round and 'round and beckoned Michael to join their group and swim away with them. He tried to, but alas! He had to keep going up for air!

Again and again he swam back into the wonderful world he had found until finally the sun began to go down and the water grew cold and it was time to go. Carefully he carried the mask and flippers back to the cliff and hid them under a rock. Then he raced home.

"Mother! Father!" he cried, bursting into the house. "I have been at the bottom of the sea! . Only wait until I tell you the things I have seen!"

"Oh, Michael," said his mother. "You're dreaming wild dreams again!"

"Not dreams, mother. It's true. I've spent the whole day at the bottom of the sea and I've -"

"Michael," interrupted his father sternly, "You cannot swim to the bottom of the sea so let's hear no more about it."

"Could I do it with a mask and flippers?" asked Michael.

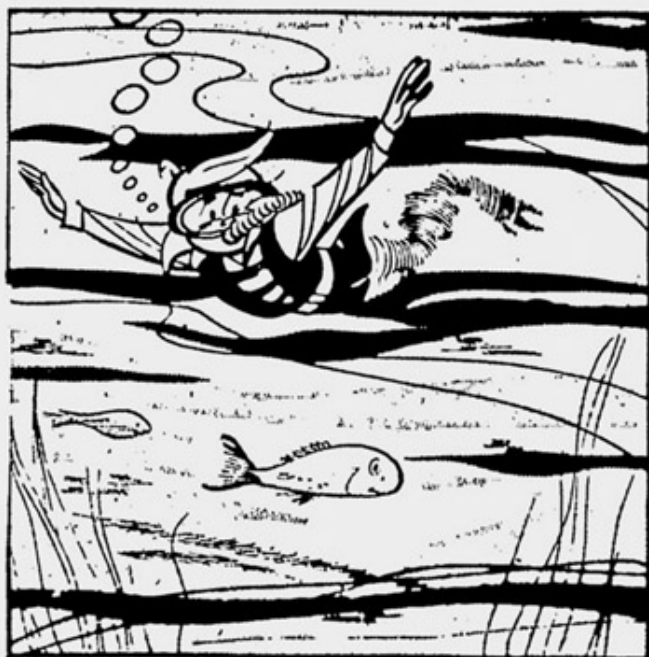
"I suppose so," said the father. "But where could one get such things?"

"I found them on the cliff! I've left them there hidden under some rocks!"

"If it's a story you're telling," said the father, "I've warned you, Michael, I'll -"

"Come, then, and I'll show you" cried Michael and, dancing with excitement, he led his mother and father back to the cliff and to the rock where he'd hidden his find.

But when he lifted the rock, the treasure was gone!



Michael felt he was flying in the sea

Chapter 3

A NIGHT VISITOR

Michael could not believe his treasure was gone. He searched frantically under the rocks.

“They were right here - under this black rock! I wouldn’t forget the place. Look - you can see where I kicked up all these little pebbles to mark the spot.”

His fisherman father shook his head. “You’ve been telling stories again, Michael. There never were flippers and mask and you’ve never been to the bottom of the sea!”

“No, it’s all true!” insisted Michael and he began snatching up all the rocks he could find, running wildly up and down.

His mother ran after him and caught him in her arms. “It’s one of your dreams, son. Come home to supper now and forget it all.”

“It wasn’t a dream, it wasn’t!” cried Michael and as his mother led him home he kept looking back over his shoulder, expecting any moment to see the treasure lying again on the cliff.

“Now, Michael.” said his father at the supper table, “people in the village are beginning to think we have a queer one for a son. I forbid you to tell any more of your wild stories. It’s for your own good I say it.”

Michael nodded obediently but there was a faraway look in his eyes. He was not really listening. He was remembering all the things he had found that day in the sea.

The next day he returned to the beach. He swam far out from shore and dived under the water. But he could not dive deep enough or see well enough to find the enchanted world he had discovered the day before. The water was dull looking and stung his eyes. He returned to shore and spent the rest of the day searching for the lost mask and flippers.

At supper that night he was bubbling over with sudden good spirits.

“What is it that makes you so happy?” asked his mother, relieved that he had forgotten his loss.

“I’ve been thinking,” said Michael “Christmas will be here soon.”

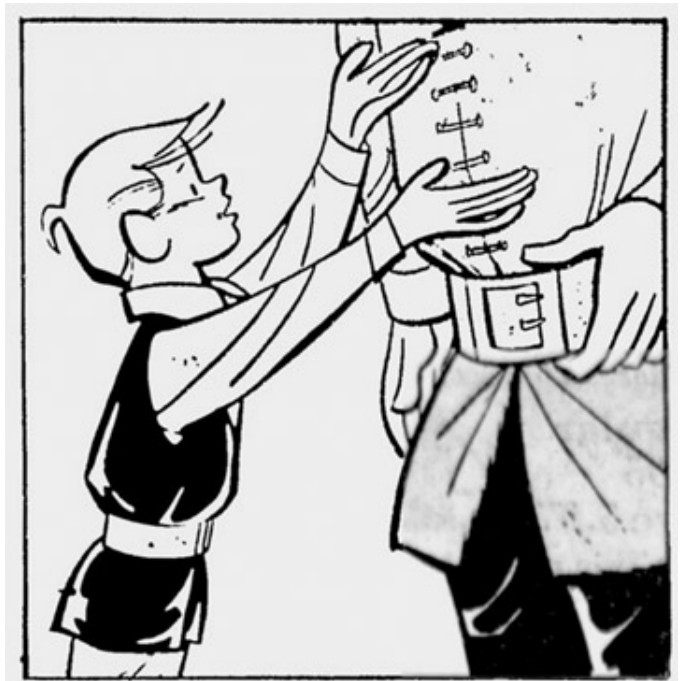
“And a poor Christmas be,” grunted his father.

“I shall get mask and flippers for Christmas,” announced Michael cheerfully.

“What?” exploded his father. And his mother said, “Ah, Michael, we’ve only pennies enough in the house to get a tree. There will be nothing under it this year, I’m afraid.”

Michael’s eyes sparkled. “I’m going to ask Santa Claus for mask and flippers. He’ll bring them, I’m sure, because I’ve never asked for anything before and when I tell him what I saw under the sea he will want me to go there again and -”

The old fisherman pushed back his chair and rose from the table. “Enough!” he shouted. “You are out of your head!” And he strode angrily from the house.



“I’m going to ask Santa for them!” Michael cried

Michael turned to his mother. “Isn’t it true Santa brings children what they want most in the world?”

His mother gazed into his shining eyes. “I don’t know, my son.”

“But haven’t you heard it’s so?”

She nodded reluctantly. “I’ve heard it’s so,” she whispered.

Michael rushed to his room and slammed the door. A long time later he came out carrying a letter and while his mother sadly shook her head he ran all the way to the village post office to drop it in the mail.

A few days later there was a tapping at Michael’s window in the dead of night. The boy’s eyes flew open and his heart pounded to hear the sound. He slipped from his bed and crept to the window and he knew, even before he saw the face pressing against the pane, who was there.

Chapter 4

MICHAEL GOES TO SANTA LAND

Michael threw open the window and there, sure enough, was Santa Claus leaning against the sill, his face beaming and his eyes sparkling in the light of the moon.

Michael shivered though the night was warm. "It's you! Oh, I knew you'd come - though I didn't think you'd come until Christmas - and my father said you'd never come at all!"

"Shhh," said Santa, perching himself on the window sill. "Not so loud! If someone should see me who doesn't believe in me I'd melt clean away."

Michael clutched Santa's arm as if by holding on to him he could keep him from disappearing. "Have you brought me my mask and flippers? Show them to me!"

Santa's shoulders heaved up and down in silent laughter. "Not so fast! I've come first to ask you if it's really true what you wrote me you saw in the sea?"

"Oh, yes," cried Michael forgetting to whisper. "No one will believe me and I've been forbidden to speak of it but it's true, I promise you!"

"Tell me again," said Santa. "What is it like swimming deep down in the sea?"

"There are colors I'd never dreamed of," said Michael eagerly. "And the sun makes golden roads through the water. And there are fish such as no fisherman has ever caught on a line or ever even seen! And there is a forest of red shrubbery growing at the bottom. If only I could stay down there a long time without coming up to breathe I know I'd find even more wonderful things. Oh, I've got to go back!"



"Shhh!" said Santa, perching on the window sill

"And so you shall," said Santa "And this time you can stay down as long as you like."

"How can that be?"

"I shall make you a lung to wear on your back," said Santa. "With it you can breathe under water. And I shall make you flippers that will help you to swim as fast as the fastest fish. And I shall make you a mask through which you can see even more clearly than you did before."

Michael's mouth fell open. "W-why are you doing this for me?"

"Michael," said Santa, "It was I who put the mask and flippers on the cliff and I who took them away. I was looking for a boy who truly loves the sea and now make you into a Boy Fish and you shall travel where only fish swim and no man has ever been before."

Michael's eyes grew wider and wider. "No one will ever believe it!"

"No one need ever know. Get dressed now and we'll go to Santa Land and I'll fit you with all you need."

"But - my mother - my father - what will they say when they find me gone?"

"Time is different in the land where you are going," chuckled Santa Claus. "A day there is only a moment here. We'll go and be back before they know you're gone." He reached in his pocket and pulled out a little round pill. "Swallow this and follow me."

Michael dressed quickly. He took the little round pill and popped it into his mouth. It tasted like the maple syrup he put on pancakes in the mornings.

At first nothing happened. Then Michael's eyes closed and he thought he heard a bugle blowing and the sound of drums. A soft breeze ruffled his hair. The breeze became a great wind and he was whirling, whirling, whirling. He grew colder and colder and colder. Suddenly it was over and all was quiet again.

He opened his eyes and there he was in a snow covered land. He stared dizzily up at Santa and Santa took his hand and smiled down at him. "Here we are," he said gently. "Santa Land!"

Chapter 5

COSTENBRICKER'S SPELL

Michael stared dazedly about. He was from a southern land and had never seen snow in his life. But now, wherever his eye could see. There was snow - fields of it, mountains of it, and clouds of it at that very moment falling from the sky.

He saw, snuggled in the blanket of white, a little red house. Behind the house was a long low building and behind this was a barn.

"The reindeer are in the barn," said Santa. "And the elves are in their shops where they never stop working at this time of year. We will see them later but first we must let Mrs. Santa know I am back."

When they reached the little red house Santa said, "Better knock the snow off our feet - Mrs. Santa is very particular about her rugs."

As they stood there stamping their feet on the porch the door flung open and Mrs. Santa burst out—flapping her apron and talking wildly. "You're back . . . thought you'd never make it . . . this awful creature . . . Costenbricker . . . never saw anyone so old . . . everyone's asleep . . . it's awful . . . what shall we do . . . if only . . ."

Santa shook with laughter.

"You needn't laugh!" cried Mrs. Santa indignantly. "It's nothing to laugh about!"

"It's only that I can't understand a word you're saying," explained Santa. "Come in the house and tell it to me slowly."

He led the way into the little house and there before the fire blazing on the hearth Mrs. Santa dropped into a chair and burst into tears.

Now Santa was upset. "I will get you some hot chocolate and you will feel better," he said and he started for the kitchen.

"No, no! Not in the kitchen," cried Mrs. Santa springing from her chair and following him.

But it was too late. Santa, with Michael and Mrs. Santa at his heels, flung open the kitchen door. Before them sat a man so old he must have seen a thousand summers. He was short as a drumstick and skinny as a streak of lightning. Threads of white hair ringed his small bald head and triple strength spectacles sat on the bridge of his nose.

He sat on a stool at the kitchen table twirling a parasol between his knees and helping himself, now and then, to one of Mrs. Santa's cookies that filled a bowl on the table.

"Greetings," he said calmly peering at Santa from beneath his bushy white eyebrows.

"Who are you?" asked Santa, finding his voice at last.

"It's Costenbricker!" cried Mrs. Santa tremulously. "He's the one I've been telling you about!" Taking courage from Santa's presence she put her hands on her hips and glared at the creature. "Tell him what you've done," she ordered indignantly.

Costenbricker tapped his umbrella thoughtfully on the floor and scratched absent-mindedly at the top of his bald head. Then he said, "Sorry, young fellow, but I had to do it"

"Do what?" demanded Santa.

"He's put the elves to sleep." cried Mrs. Santa outraged. "And the reindeer, too. There's not one worker in Santa Land on the job"

"But, what on earth for?" cried Santa, unable to believe his ears.

"For a black pearl," said Costenbricker and his old hands quivered as he reached for another cookie.

"B-but - I have no black pearl!" exclaimed Santa.

"I know, I know," nodded Costenbricker. "But you must get it for me or your elves will never wake up."



He sat on a stool helping himself to cookies

Chapter 6

THE SLEEPING ELVES

“My elves never sleep at this time of year!” exclaimed Santa. “They have to work day and night or we’d never be ready for Christmas.”

“They are asleep now,” said Costenbricker, calmly tapping his parasol against his heel.

“It’s true,” cried Mrs. Santa. “I’ve seen them myself! Oh, it’s awful!” She began to flap her apron more wildly than ever

“Then I’ll wake them!” said Santa crossly. “This will never do.” He rushed from the house, with Michael and Mrs. Santa at his heels and Costenbricker shuffling along ten paces behind.

“I don’t believe it. I don’t believe it.” muttered Santa as he ran puffing through the snow drifts. But when he threw open the door of the workshop he saw that it was true: every little worker was fast asleep.



“The ship carrying the pearl went down,” he said

Michael stared about him in dismay. The doll makers lay limply among heaps of painted heads and rubber bodies looking themselves like dolls someone had forgotten to finish. The drum-makers slept curled in their drums. The firecracker experts made sputtering noises as they snored at their benches.

Muffin, the whistle-maker, lay in a corner and snorted as he breathed in and whistled as he breathed out. Toy wagons were loaded with napping elves and Gilbert, the stilt-maker, slept among the rafters where he’d dozed off while trying out some high stilts.

“Wake up, wake up!” cried Santa rushing from table to table. He pounded on the backs of the sleeping elves, shook their shoulders, shouted in their ears. Nothing would wake them.

Santa turned on Costenbricker “What’s the meaning of this? What have you done?”

“He’s cast a spell.” moaned Mrs. Santa. “He came in here and said some magic words and they all fell asleep. Oh, what’s to become of us?”

“Now, now,” said Costenbricker, settling down with a sigh into a half finished doll’s chair.

“There’s nothing to get overwrought about. When you have gotten me my black pearl I will say some more words and all your little workers will wake up and do even better work for having had such a good rest.”

“Where would I get a black pearl?” demanded Santa. “It’s the rarest gem in the world.”

“I know where there is one,” said Costenbricker. “It belongs to me.”

“Then why do you come to me?”

“Because, unfortunately, my pearl lies at the bottom of the sea and alas! I cannot swim and am too old to learn. But you can do anything, go anywhere, and so you can get my pearl!”

“What makes you think your pearl is in the ocean?”

Costenbricker pulled a crumpled map from his pocket and pointed to an X which marked a spot in a southern sea. “Centuries ago, a ship sank on this very spot and treasure that was on her is on her still.”

“Bosh! How do you know that’s true?”

“Because,” said Costenbricker, twirling his parasol. “I was on the ship and the pearl was mine. When the ship went down I floated away in an empty keg but the pearl stayed behind. It was a gem of great worth. Whoever carries it stays young forever. I am old now, my hands tremble, my mind wanders, I forget things I used to know. I must have the pearl to restore my youth.”

“It’s impossible!” cried Santa “I cannot get it for you. Neither I nor any other elf can go into the sea”

Costenbricker’s eyes widened in astonishment. “I didn’t know that. Oh dear, what shall I do now?”

“You’ll say the words that will waken my workers, that’s what you will do,” said Santa indignantly.

“Yes. yes.” nodded Costenbricker vaguely. “There’s certainly no reason to keep them asleep if you can’t help me”

He scratched thoughtfully at his bald head and gazed up at the ceiling. Three times he opened his mouth to speak and three times he shut it again. His shoulders began to droop. He looked very sad.

Finally he sighed heavily and said, “I’m sorry, I can’t remember the words.”

Chapter 7

MICHAEL'S PLAN

Costenbricker sat with his head in his hands. "I can't remember the words that will break the spell," he muttered unhappily

"But you must!" cried Santa. "Think!"

"I am thinking," sighed Costenbricker. "But, as I told you. I am very old and I do not remember things as well as I did a hundred years ago. That is why I would like to have my black pearl. It will bring back my youth and my mind will be young and lively again."

Santa paced furiously up and down while Michael gazed horrified at the roomful of sleeping elves and Mrs. Claus fluttered her apron and moaned.

Suddenly Costenbricker's face lit up and he said sharply, "Peels Peels, Eltte Seevle!"

All eyes turned and eagerly searched the room. But the elves slept peacefully on.

Costenbricker drooped again. "Those must have been the same words that put them to sleep," he said dolefully and he twisted his parasol round and round and pondered some more.

Santa threw up his hands and Mrs. Santa collapsed in a chair. Michael stood in a corner and thought and thought. Finally he came up to Costenbricker and said "Are you sure you would remember the words if you had your pearl?"

"Oh, absolutely," said Costenbricker nodding his head vigorously.

"Then I will get the pearl," said Michael.

"What?" cried Santa.

"Make me the flippers and lungs you promised and I can dive for the sunken treasure," said Michael, his eyes shining with excitement.

"Oh, dear," said Santa. "I meant for you to explore in the

friendly seas near your home. To dive for sunken treasure would be dangerous. Who knows what lies in the ocean deeps?"

"Please!" cried Michael. "Please let me try!"

Santa gazed in distress at his sleeping dwarfs and the mountain of unfinished toys. At last he said, "Very well. I must let you go, for unless you succeed we cannot have Christmas this year."

With Michael at his heels, he hurried into his own private work room at the end of the shop. Here were tools of every description, and shelves of models, and barrels of tops and autos and boats and watches and a hundred other wonders.

On a nearby table were stacks of notebooks in which Santa kept, neatly listed, the requests for gifts from every little boy and girl in the world. On his desk there were blueprints for a marvelous new toy he had planned to put in every Christmas stocking that year.

While Michael watched in wonder, Santa set about pulling out sheets of rubber, blocks of glass, and tubes of plastic. Motors whirred and chips flew as he cut, fitted and molded. He worked quickly and surely but even so it was a long time before the job was finished.

Finally he was ready. He strapped a small round tank on Michael's shoulders and showed him how to connect it by a breathing tube to a face mask. Then he gave him a pair of strong rubber flippers.

"There," he said. "You are a Boy Fish and anywhere a fish can go you can go, too."

Michael examined his treasures. He could hardly wait to be away and at the bottom of the sea.

Costenbricker, leaning unsteadily on his parasol, appeared at the door. "Ready?" he asked.

"Wait a bit," said Santa. "I will get one of the reindeer to take you."

"The reindeer are asleep" Costenbricker reminded him sadly.

"But no matter, I have my own means of transportation." With that he flung open the parasol at his side and said, "Come, Boyfish, we are off!"



"Please!" cried Michael. "Please let me try!"

Chapter 8

A PERILOUS TRIP

Costenbricker's parasol was enormous. It was made of red silk with purple polka dots. It had a long handle with two crooks on the end.

"Usually," said Costenbricker. "I travel sitting in one of the crooks but all this excitement has tired me and I expect we better make ourselves comfortable."

Saying this, he turned the umbrella upside down. Michael was astonished to see little yellow cushions lying on the bottom and a fat green quilt tucked around the handle and bunches of bananas hanging from the ribs.

"How do all those things fit in the parasol when its closed?" he exclaimed.

"Who said all those things are in there when its closed." retorted Costenbricker mysteriously. "Get in now and away we'll go"

Michael turned to Santa, "Aren't you going?"

"Santa shook his head. "It's best for me to stay here and do what work I can though it will all be useless unless you find the pearl and Costenbricker remembers the magic words that will waken the elves."

"Don't worry," said Costenbricker cheerfully. "We'll be back in no time at all!" He climbed into the parasol and Michael, tucking his precious mask and lung and flippers down among the pillows, scrambled in beside him.

Costenbricker shoved his tripe-strength spectacles to the top of his forehead, put his hand over his eyes and muttered unintelligibly to himself. Nothing happened. Perspiration broke out on the old man's bald head as he clenched his hands and sought to remember the right incantation. He muttered on and on.

Suddenly the polka dot parasol rocked back and forth and slowly rose from the floor.

"Hooray!" cried Costenbricker triumphantly.

"Wait!" cried Santa. "It'll never go through the door!"

Costenbricker blinked. "Oh, dear, I forgot that."

There was nothing for them to do but crawl out of the parasol, fold it up and carry it outdoors and open it up again. This time, Costenbricker got the right words the very first time and the parasol rose instantly into the air. A moment later, when Michael peeped over the side Santa and Mrs. Santa were only tiny specks waving from far below.

"Have a banana," said Costenbricker, "and make yourself at home. It's a long trip and I am going to nap for I am over a thousand years old and need a lot of rest."

Michael gazed in wonder at the shriveled up face. "Are you really a thousand years old" he whispered.

Costenbricker shut his eyes. "I'm as old as Time," he murmured. "And I feel every second of it." With that he fell asleep.

The parasol sailed peacefully on. Michael fell back on the pillows and covered himself with the soft comforter. After a while, he too fell asleep.

He was awakened by a loud crash. The parasol lurched crazily. The pillows fell out and the comforter disappeared. Bananas flew away into space. Costenbricker landed on top of Michael.

"What is it?" cried Michael in terror, struggling to his knees and clutching the parasol handle.

"A storm cloud!" shouted Costenbricker. He clung to Michael's legs with all his strength but it seemed that at any minute they both would be torn loose and hurled from the somersaulting parasol.

Streaks of lightning tore through the black rain. Thunder deafened them. The wind whipped the parasol over and over and around in circles. They plunged toward the earth. They were sucked back into the sky.

Michael shut his eyes and hung on. He wished, for a moment, that he had never left home, that he was safe back in his own little bed.

Then, as suddenly as they went into the storm they were out of it and the parasol was sailing serenely through a pink blue sky. Costenbricker sighed with relief but Michael's eyes filled with horror.

"My mask and flippers and lung!" he cried. "They're gone!"



Lightning flashed and wind whipped the parasol

Chapter 9

BACK INTO THE STORM



**Down, down, down they plummeted,
faster and faster**

It was true. The precious gifts from Santa had hurtled out of the parasol along with the pillows and comforter and bananas. There was nothing to do except go back into the storm cloud and come to earth where they could search for the missing mask and lung and flippers.

Costenbricker turned the parasol about and guided it back into the gales they had just escaped. Again the angry winds lifted the parasol and flipped it over and over and hurled it across the clouds like a car on a roller coaster. The few remaining magic words Costenbricker could remember now flew from his head and he could say nothing that would make the rollicking parasol do his bidding.

They were swept finally to what was surely the very top of the sky when suddenly the polka dot silk turned inside out and the parasol shot toward the ground with Michael and Costenbricker hanging to the handle.

Down, down, down they plummeted, faster and faster. It seemed that they would certainly smash into the ground. But as they fell through the clouds the storm grew less fierce until finally it was over. The polka dot silk opened up again and parachuted gently to earth.

They were on an Island in a blue green sea. The air was warm and soft breezes blew. The sun danced on the surface of the water as if there had never been a storm in the world.

Costenbricker collapsed on ground. "Never will I leave earth again!" he cried. "I'm too old for that kind of thing!"

But Michael was already on his feet and running toward the beach. While the parasol was drifting near to the earth he had seen - though he could hardly believe it - his lung floating on the sea!

There was a small boat pulled up on the beach. Michael dragged it to the water and rowed out to retrieve his lung. The face mask was fastened to the lung and only the flippers were missing.

Costenbricker called from shore and waved his feet frantically over his head. But when Michael rowed to the beach he saw it wasn't Costenbricker's feet but his own flippers dangling from the old man's hands.

"I found them not five yards from where we landed! And guess what, my boy?" Costenbricker threw down the flippers and dragged the crumpled map from his pocket. "We've reached our destination! This is the spot - the very island we were headed for. How is that for luck?"

Michael wondered if it really were luck or if Santa Claus, far away in Santa Land, was not helping them in some mysterious way. Why else would they have been caught in the storm that caused them to land in just the right spot? And why else would there have been a row boat sitting so conveniently on the beach?

Costenbricker, forgetting his vow never to leave land again, scrambled into the boat and ordered Michael to put to sea. Happily Michael bent to the oars and rowed with all his might. The sea was dotted with islands, large and small, and it was somewhere among them, said Costenbricker, that the Sunken ship lay.

"We'll have to hunt a bit before we find her," he said. "But she's in these waters for sure."

"May I go down now?" asked Michael impatiently. "Not yet," said Costenbricker, scanning the water. Every few minutes, Michael would ask again, "Now?" But Costenbricker kept shaking his head, "Wait."

On and on they rowed in widening circles until the old man, peering over the side of the boat, finally exclaimed, "Now!"

Quickly Michael fitted the flippers on his feet. He fastened the lung to his shoulders and connected it to the diving mask on his face. Then, with a wave of his hand, he slipped over the side and into the sea.

Chapter 10

THE SEARCH FOR THE SHIP

With a thrust of his flipper's, Michael dove deep into the sea. Breathing air from the lung on his back he glided down, down, down.

What a strange sensation it was! He felt as if he were weightless floating through space. He laughed and turned a lazy somersault and landed with a soft plop in a meadow of crimson grass at the bottom of the sea.

"Grunt, grunt!"

Michael looked down in amazement. A blue stripe fish darted around his legs, grunting furiously. Chasing the grunt fish was an eel-like creature, 10 feet long.

Before he had time to be afraid, Michael grasped the astonished eel by the head and tail, tied it into a knot and sent it rolling like a hoop across the ocean floor.

The grunt fish stared at Michael in awe. It darted away and, a moment later, returned with all its brothers and sisters. With a chorus of happy grunts they surrounded Michael. He had made his first ocean friends.

Other fish came to see strange Boy Fish. A pink squirrel fish skittered around his feet, chattering curiously. A big fat balloon fish swam by and puffed up to twice its size when Michael poked at it with his finger. Schools of tiny orange twirlers danced around him, moving only in circles. A red eyed squirter raced by propelled by water shooting from its tail.

Frolicking with the others, the Boy Fish learned how to lie motionless in the water, how to turn quickly, and how to dive without making a single ripple in the water.



Michael tied the astonished eel into a knot

Never had he had so much fun! Then he remembered Costenbricker waiting in the rowboat far above him.

"I've played too long." He thought guiltily. "I must find the black pearl."

Surrounded by his new friends, he swam off to hunt for the sunken ship. Everywhere he went there was some new marvel to be seen but not a sign of the wreck. At last he swam back up to the surface.

"Did you find her?" asked Costenbricker eagerly.

Michael shook his head.

"Take the oars," ordered Costenbricker. "We'll try another spot!"

They rowed to another spot but when Michael dove again, it was the same story: There was no wreck to be seen. That night they beached the boat on an island and slept curled up beneath Costenbricker's spreading parasol. The next morning they set out again to search the sea. Still there was no sign of the sunken ship.

Day after day went by and Michael began to doubt that there ever been such a ship. He thought of Santa and the sleeping elves. "What if there really wasn't any wreck and no pearl to be found." he wondered. "How then will Costenbricker ever remember the magic words that will waken the elves in time for Christmas?"

Even the old man began to doubt that the ship was there. At night, under Michael's urging, he tried his best to remember the forgotten words that would break the spell.

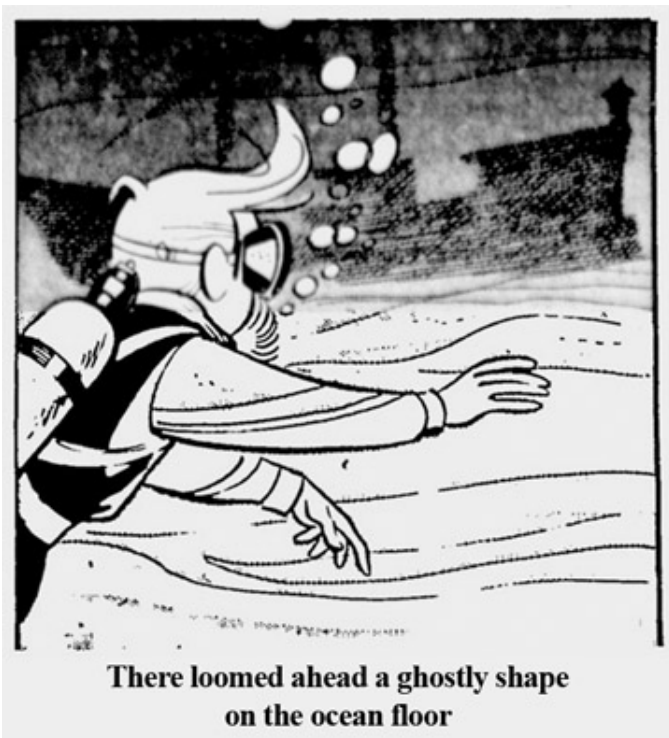
"It's no use." he would always say in the end. "My mind is muddled by a thousand years."

Then one morning he woke and cried. "Boy, I've remembered"

Michael sprang up. "The words?"

"Not the words! The ship! I remember where she sank. It was at the foot of a great island cliff. She floundered on the rocks beneath it. Find the cliff and we'll find the ship. Into the boat, boy - today we'll find the pearl!"

But as they struggled to fold up the parasol they heard a sudden crackling on the beach. Turning, they saw an awful sight: The rowboat was in flames!



**There loomed ahead a ghostly shape
on the ocean floor**

Chapter 11

UNFRIENDLY SEAS

Michael and Costenbricker watched helplessly as the row boat burned to ashes.

“How could it have happened? Who could have done it?” cried Michael.

Costenbricker pointed to footprints leading from the sea to the burned out boat and back to the sea again. “There’s who did it! Some monster from the deep. Oh, if I could only swim I’d go after him!” He stamped his foot in rage.

In all his days of diving Michael had found only friends in the sea. Now he shivered to think some monstrous creature might have been lurking there and watching him all the while.

Costenbricker’s rage suddenly departed. “It doesn’t matter, after all. We don’t need the boat to find the island cliff. We’ll travel by parasol.”

So saying, he opened the parasol and he and Michael scrambled in. A moment later they were sailing above the islands with Costenbricker hanging over the edge of the parasol searching for the cliff.

At last he cried, “There it is - right below!” he yanked at the parasol handle and they landed gently on the top of a high cliff whose sides dropped straight down into the sea.

Michael stared at the water far, far below. “H-how will I ever get down there?” he quavered.

“Easy,” replied Costenbricker cheerfully. He started unwinding something from around his tiny waist. “I’ll lower you on this!” He laid out a rope of incredible length.

While Michael secured his diving gear, Costenbricker carefully tied one end of the rope around a large rock. The

other end he tied around Michael’s waist. Then Michael dropped over the edge of the cliff and, inch by inch to the sea.

When Michael looked down, he grew dizzy at the sight of the faraway waters. He closed his eyes and tried not to think of what might be lying in wait below. Finally his feet touched water. Quickly he untied the rope from his waist and waved to Costenbricker, who was peering down from above. Then he dove head first into the deep.

Here was not the clear green waters he had swam in before. No golden paths of sunlight shimmered down from the surface. The water was an eerie blue and all the shapes and shadows he saw were blue. It was cold and silent. His heart pounding, Michael walked slowly along the ocean floor, peering this way and that, expecting he knew not what.

Something cold and slimy suddenly fastened itself around his legs and held him fast. He struggled to free himself but the more he twisted and turned, the more securely he was bound.

“What’ll happen now?” he groaned and he thought mournfully of Costenbricker and Santa’s elves who now might never wake up.

Then he saw that he had merely stepped into a patch of giant sea weed and what held him fast was its slimy branches. Moving slowly he carefully untwined the embracing weed and broke free.

Hardly had he slipped away than he felt a sharp pain in his foot and he was trapped again. Fighting off new panic, he bent down and discovered that a shelled creature had angrily clamped its jaws around his toes.

Holding back tears of pain, he pried open the shell and limped on. He longed to return to the surface of the sea but just when he felt he could no longer stand the pain and the cold and the fright, there suddenly loomed ahead of him a ghostly shape rising from the ocean floor.

He stopped and stared and then he thought joyfully, “It’s the ship, the ship at last!”

Chapter 12

MONSTER OF THE DEEP

The sunken ship, tilted on its side, lay on the ocean floor, half covered by a hundred years of drifting sands. Three broken masts rose from the deck like blue phantoms in a silent blue world.

Michael scraped at the barnacles and sea moss encrusted on the bow. Slowly the letters ABADOON appeared.

With a quick thrust of his flippers he shot up to surface and swam back to the cliff. He had gone a long way under water and it was some time before he was close enough to shout, "It's the ship! I've found her!" He waved his arms and thrashed the waves to attract attention. But there was no sign of Costenbricker high on the cliff. Michael grasped the rope that dangled in the water and tied it around his waist.

"Pull me up!" he shouted. But there was no answer from above. He yanked impatiently at the rope. Suddenly it tightened and slowly pulled him out of the water and up the side of the cliff. When he reached the top he grasped the edge and pulled himself over.

"It's the ARADOON!" he cried, pushing back his face mask and untying the rope from his waist "Her name's still on the bow - plain as can be and she's big - big as this!"

He dropped the rope and turned to show with his hands how big the ship was. Instantly the words fled from his head and his mouth fell open in surprise for, sitting before him on an old sea chest, was not Costenbricker, but a red-whiskered man with a 3-fingered hand.

Michael took a step backward. "W-who are you?"

"I am the Monster of the Deep," replied the creature. He rubbed his red whiskered chin and gazed thoughtfully at Michael.

"Y-you don't look like a monster," said Michael, taking another step backward, "You - you look like a man."

"I have many shapes." The Monster held up his 3-fingered hand. "And I have as many lives as I have fingers on this hand. I used to have five. I lost one in the wreck of the ARADOON a hundred years ago. I was a barnacle riding on her side and when she went down I was crushed beneath her.

"I lost another when, disguised as a shark, I was tossed ashore one stormy night and a frightened fisherman chopped off my head. Now I have three lives left."

"That is very interesting," said Michael politely. "But could you tell me where Costenbricker is? I left him here on the cliff just where you are sitting now."

"And he's here still," said the Monster and he patted the sea chest on which he sat.

"In - in that box? But why?"

"I have put him there," said the Monster, "because he is after my black pearl. After I have gotten rid of him I will get rid of you because even if you do not get the pearl you will tell others of it and treasure seekers will be coming here forever after."

"But it's not your pearl!" protested Michael. "It belongs to Costenbricker. He was on the ship when she sank!"

"Everything in the ocean belongs to me," said the Monster "When the ARADOON sank she became mine and everything on her is mine."

He rose and began to shove the sea chest toward the edge of the cliff. From inside the chest came a muffled cry.

"Help! Help!"

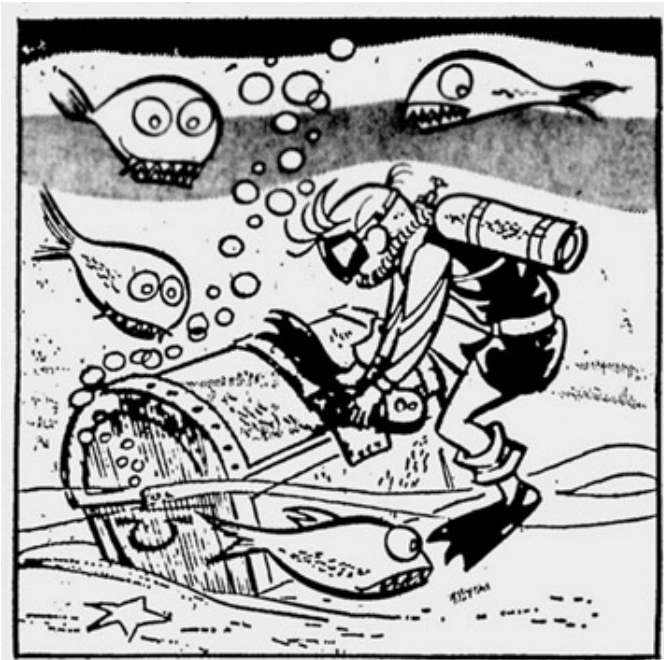
"He can't swim!" shouted Michael. "He'll drown!" He threw himself on top of the chest.

Laughing, the Monster tossed Michael aside and hurled the chest over the cliff and into the sea.



The Monster hurled the chest into the sea

Chapter 13
THE COPY FISH



A group of fierce-looking copy fish surrounded him

Michael watched in horror as the chest with Costenbricker in it went over the cliff. He ran to the edge and watched it hurtling down and into the sea.

“He’ll die down there!” he cried. “Even if he gets out of the chest, he can’t swim and he’ll drown!”

“True,” said the Monster. He grinned through his red whiskers and took a step towards the boy.

Michael stood petrified. The Monster took another step. Michael’s knees began to tremble. He tried to speak but no word came from his mouth.

The Monster took another step and, abruptly, Michael found the power to move. He turned to dive from the cliff. But never before had he dived from so great a height and the sight of the water so far below terrified him. Between the Monster and the sea, he did not know which way to go. He glanced around in panic and suddenly saw the rope, one end still tied to the rock and the other end curled at the cliff’s edge.

He pounced on the rope and hurled the free end over the cliff. Quickly he slipped over the edge and began to descend, hand over hand, to the sea.

The rope swayed back and forth, scraping him against the side of the cliff. His arms ached. His hands burned. Still he struggled on until he was halfway down.

Then an awful thing happened. Though he kept on descending, hand over hand, he was getting no nearer to the sea. The faster he dropped, the more he seemed to stand still! The rope was being pulled back to the top of the cliff and, for every foot he struggled down, he was pulled back two.

He looked up and saw the grinning Monster peering over the cliff and hauling up the rope. He looked down. Each moment the water was getting farther and farther away. Suddenly he let go of the rope and fell head over heels into the sea.

He hit the water with a force that yanked back his mask and almost tore the lung from his back. It sent him all the way to the bottom where he arrived gasping for breath.

He choked on the sea water and struggled to replace the mask that fed him air from the lung. Just in time he got it back in place and, without pausing to rest, swam off to search for the sea chest.

A group of fierce looking copy fish appeared out of nowhere and surrounded him. Razor sharp teeth protruded from their mouths and their yellow eyes blinked off and on like electric lights. Wide-eyed with terror Michael braced himself to escape. But the copy fish paid no attention him. They stared entranced at strange bubbles drifting lazily up through the water.

“Why, those are air bubbles!” thought Michael. “It’s Costenbricker!”

He tracked the bubbles to the bottom and sure enough there was the sea chest. The force of its fall had almost buried it in the sand but the bubbles rising steadily from its cracks showed that there was still air in it and a furious banging on the top showed that Costenbricker was still alive.

Frantically, Michael dug out the chest but try as he might he could not lift it from the bottom. He tore at the lock with his fingers but could not break it.

The copy fish swarmed around him watching curiously. They came closer and closer. They wanted to copy the Boy Fish, do what he did. They began to poke at the lock and in no time their sharp teeth had cut right through it and the chest flew open.

Chapter 14

THE TURTLE CITY

When the chest flew open water burst in and Costenbricker, crouching inside and still clutching his parasol, was submerged. He waved his parasol stick and began to shout.

This was a mistake because when he opened his mouth water rushed in there, too, and very nearly finished him off then and there.

Michael dragged the sputtering fellow out of the chest and, shooting past the astonished copy fish, carried him to the surface. Costenbricker fastened his arms around Michael's back to keep afloat and shouted furiously, "I heard the Monster! It's not true! The black pearl belongs to me and nothing he can do will stop me from having it!"

Poor Michael! He could hardly keep afloat. The more he struggled, the more he went under and each time he went under Costenbricker climbed higher, on his back until finally he was straddling Michael's neck.

Michael did not know where to turn. If he went under, Costenbricker would drown. If he returned to the cliff island, the Monster would be waiting for them. He could not possibly swim to another island with Costenbricker on his back.

Meanwhile, Costenbricker sat on his shoulders and waved his parasol stick and talked steadily. "I wish Santa Claus could know the good news! The black pearl lies right beneath us and it won't be long before I'll have it and be young again. Then I will remember the magic words that will waken the elves and reindeer!"

Michael, about to sink again, saw a giant sea tortoise swimming lazily by. He reached out like a drowning man and clasped both hands around the tortoise's huge shell. The amazed creature gave one horrified look over its shoulder and took off like a rocket across the sea.

"Hey!" screamed Costenbricker. "Where are you going? You're swimming too fast, my boy! We're leaving the wreck behind."

At this moment, the panic-stricken tortoise tipped over and plunged under the water with Michael still clinging to its back and Costenbricker still clinging to Michael's neck.

Before anyone had time to breathe or need to breathe, the tortoise had left the sea and dragged his two passengers into a cave under an island. Air reached the cave through a funnel that led from the island above and a vague blue light was reflected from the ocean outside.

Michael looked around in astonishment. The cave was filled with turtles. They lay, shell to shell, on the ledges lining the cave, like little stone houses stacked on the sides of a hill. They moved with slow deliberation, their heads swiveling back and forth on their long necks as they stared curiously at the strangers.

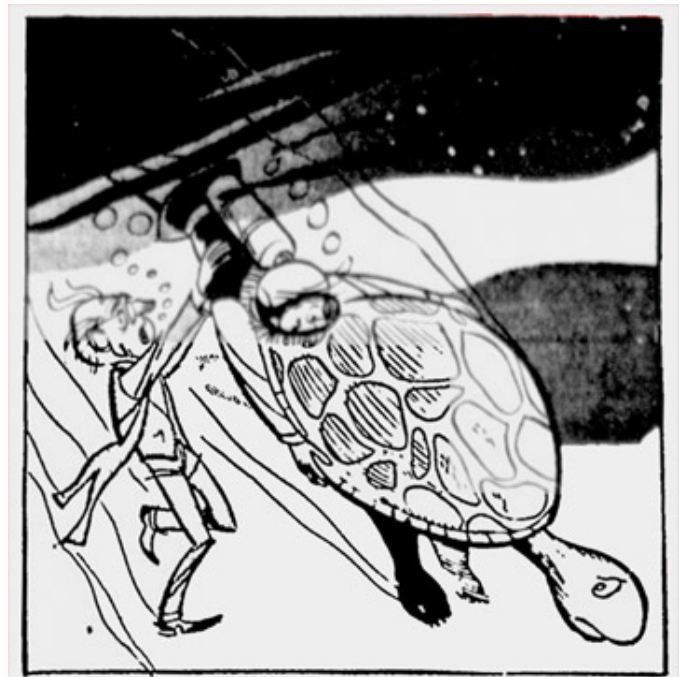
"Where in the world are we?" demanded Costenbricker as he hopped up and down on one foot trying to shake the water from his ears.

"It looks like a Turtle City," said Michael. "It must be that every turtle in the sea lives here."

Costenbricker looked with distaste at the lazy tortoises. "I'd like to see more activity," he said. "But never mind, I'll stay here while you go back to the wreck. Now remember, the pearl is in a trunk in the captain's cabin. You can't miss it. Don't let anything stop you."

Michael thought of the Monster who had sworn to stop him if it took all of his three lives. He longed to stay safe in the Turtle City. Then he thought of Santa Claus and all that depended on his finding the pearl and he knew he must go.

He tightened his face mask and said goodbye to Costenbricker. Then he crawled out of the cave and set out again for the ARADOON.



The tortoise plunged under water with Michael clinging to its back

Chapter 15

THE GIANT SQUID

Not so far from the Turtle City Michael saw the blue shadowed hulk of the Aradoon looming ahead of him. Swarms of fish hovered around the prow and thousands of mussels clung to the naked masts.

Michael grasped the anchor chain and something snapped around his fingers. He drew back in alarm. A lobster was clinging to his hand. He flung it off and kicked at the chain. Dozens of lobsters tumbled off of it.

He swam over the half-collapsed railing and stood on the buckled deck. Shivering, he made his way to an open hatch and glided into a great tunnel leading down.

He passed the cook's galley with its shattered pottery scattered everywhere. He swam through the crew's quarters and the cargo areas and came at last to a closed cabin with CAPTAIN written on the tilted door.

He kicked at the door and it fell off its hinges and floated away. In the blue darkness he saw the shape of a trunk wedged under the captain's bunk.

"There it is!" he thought joyfully. But as he reached out, the whole bed seemed suddenly to come alive and an enormous arm swung down and wrapped itself around the trunk.

For a moment Michael thought the ghost of the captain himself was rising from the bed. Then two other arms slid toward him and he saw that it wasn't the captain but a giant squid guarding the treasure.

Seven of the creature's arms were missing and, staring at the other three, Michael knew that here was the three-fingered Monster of the Deep come to keep his vow.

He backed against the wall. The squid's arms followed him. Scarcely breathing, Michael edged to the doorway and turned to flee.

Propelling itself with bursts of black ink, the squid jetted after him. Slimy arms slapped at Michael's legs as he slipped through a yawning hatch and dived into the crushed-in hold. Sand scraped his chest and his shoulder blade banged against the ship's broken ribs. Suddenly he found himself wedged into a crevice and could go no farther. Twisting around in panic he saw the eye of the squid staring at him through the crevice.

"What shall I do?" moaned Michael, as he clutched the ship's ribs, a jagged sliver suddenly broke off in his hands and, without stopping to think, he plunged the tip through the crevice and speared the unsuspecting squid through the heart.

Quickly he squeezed out of the crevice and sped away. Happy as he was to have killed the squid, he knew the Monster of the Deep still had two lives left and he must hurry.

He returned to the captain's cabin and kicked off the rusted locks of the iron trunk. He threw back the top and stared wide eyed at the hundreds of pieces of gold that lay before him. Lying among the gold was a silver box and in the box was the precious black pearl. Michael took out the pearl and slipped it inside his face mask. Then, with a last look of longing at the gold, he slammed shut the trunk and turned to leave.



Lying in the trunk was the precious black pearl

"I'm free!" he thought happily as he came out on the deck. "I've escaped the Monster after all!"

But even as he spoke, a three-eyed viper fish slipped through the buckled deck and darted toward him.

Chapter 16

THE MAN OF WAR

The three-eyed viperfish was long and snake-like. It opened and closed its powerful jaws and snapped together its needle-like teeth.

As it drew nearer, Michael saw that one of its three eyes was missing and he knew it was the Monster of the Deep who, destroyed three times, still had two lives left.

For a moment Michael was too frightened to move. The viperfish swam up to his mask as though it knew the black pearl was inside. It opened its jaws to bite through the tube that led to Michael's lung. Michael struck out with his hands and, catching the creature by the tail, yanked it from his face.

The big fish was enraged. It blinked its yellow eyes and tried to shake off the boy. Michael hung stubbornly on. There was a furious fight on the deck of the sunken ship. The viperfish twisted and looped and snapped its tail but could not shake Michael off. Clouds of sand and debris rose from the deck. Michael could no longer see the creature but he could sense its panic and he knew that if he held on long enough he would win the battle.

Suddenly the fish stopped struggling and took off for the captain's bridge towing Michael behind. The remains of an old rusty cannon were on the bridge and, in desperation, the fish lunged into the cannon's mouth.

Instantly Michael released its tail and, snatching up a cannon ball from the deck, rammed it into the cannon mouth squashing the imprisoned fish

Michael trembled with relief. He leaned for a moment to rest against the tilted bridge. All the fish who had sped away during the battle now returned eager to see the strange Boy Fish who had bested both squid and viperfish in one short hour.

It was clear they wanted Michael to stay and be their leader. But Michael had had enough of the ghostly ARADOON.

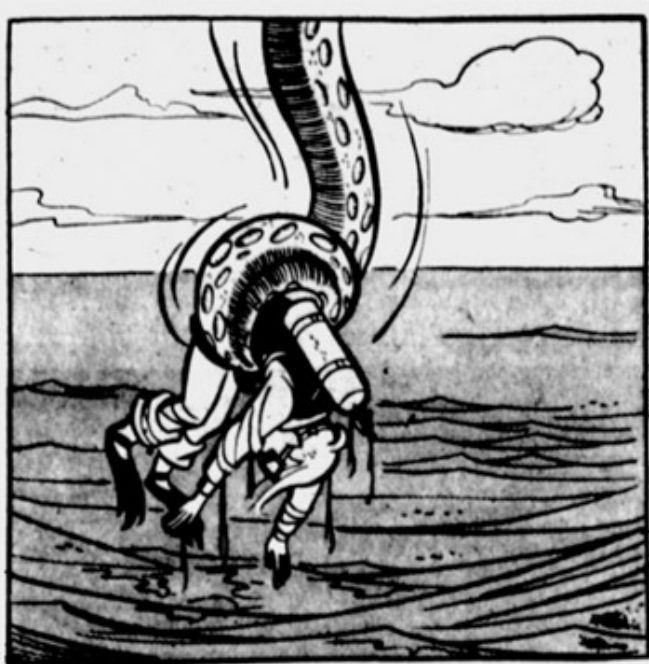
"I hope I never see it again - gold and all!" he thought fervently. Then, waving to the friendly fish, he kicked off and swam away in the dark blue sea.

As he glided back toward the Turtle City he could feel the black pearl rolling around inside his face mask. He thought to himself that all was now well for surely the Monster of the Deep, with only one life left would bother him no more.

But he was wrong for, even then, the shadow of a balloon passed overhead and, looking up in surprise, he saw a Portuguese Man-of-War hovering above him.

The bright blue jelly fish was floating on the surface of the water on its balloon-like, air-filled bladder. A stinging tentacle, fifty feet long, dangled from the bladder. Michael knew that the Man-of-War has numerous tentacles and when he saw that this one had only one he knew that the Monster of the Deep had changed his shape again and come to do battle once more.

Michael rushed faster and faster through the water but no matter how fast he swam the balloon above him sailed just as fast until finally the exhausted Boy Fish could swim no more. As soon as he stopped, the ever-present tentacle fastened around his waist and slowly, drew him out of the sea.



The tentacle fastened around his waist

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

Michael struggled in the Man of War's embrace. His arms were pressed to his sides but he kicked with his legs and butted the creature's soft underside with his head.

The jelly fish raised its long arm out of the sea and snapped it down like a whip with Michael on the end. Again and again, Michael rose in the air and cracked down through the water. The flippers on his feet and the lung on his shoulders broke loose and were carried away. Gasping for breath, Michael felt the black pearl bouncing inside his mask. Just in time he sucked it into his mouth and, an instant later, the mask, too, was torn away.

The next time he was carried into the air he saw an astonishing sight: Costenbricker, straddling an enormous tortoise and carrying his folded up parasol under his arm, was racing towards him across the sea!

"Help! Help!" shouted Michael, almost swallowing the pearl, before he was again slammed into the sea.

He held his breath and waited to be drawn up again but suddenly the arm around his waist relaxed and dropped away. Michael swam to the surface and found Costenbricker standing like a warrior on the tortoise's back.

"I punctured it with my parasol!" he crowed and he pointed at the jellyfish floating harmlessly away like a deflated rubber balloon.

The old man pulled Michael up beside him on the tortoise's back. "I persuaded this turtle to be my ship," he said, patting the tortoise's back. "In return, I told him Santa would remember Turtle City at Christmas time. That is, he will if we ever get the pearl in time.

Michael took the pearl from his mouth and slipped it into the old man's hand.

"You got it!" cried Costenbricker in disbelief. He threw off his triple strength spectacles and straightened his age-bent shoulders. Before Michael's very eyes he seemed to grow a hundred years younger.

"Now do you remember the magic words that will waken the elves?" demanded Michael eagerly.

"I do, I do!" exclaimed Costenbricker. He slipped the pearl in his pocket and flung open the parasol. "Let us return quickly to Santa Land for I am afraid there is very little time left."

He perched himself on one of the handles crooks and Michael perched on the other. The parasol rose from the sea and sped across the sky.

When they arrived in Santa and Costenbricker rushed to the toy shops where Santa had been working alone since they left.

"Ekaw pu, ekaw pu!" cried Costenbricker waving his parasol over the sleeping elves.

Instantly the little workers awoke and stared around in bewilderment. Then, seeing the mounds of unfinished toys before them, they went furiously to work. The reindeer in the

barn, suddenly wakened, stamped their hooves, eager to begin their long flight around the world.

Santa was so happy he danced a jig right on the doll maker's table. Then he said to Michael, "If it hadn't been for you there wouldn't be any Christmas this year. Now tell me what you would like."

"I've traveled a long way and I am tired," said Michael with a sigh. "I think I'd like to go home for a while."

"And so you shall," said Santa gently and he gave Michael a little red pill like he'd given him before. Michael swallowed it and; shut his eyes and when he opened them he was in his very own bed at home.

He jumped up to tell his parents of the adventures he'd had. Then he thought, "It's no use—they'll never believe me!"

So he kept the tale of his marvelous adventures to himself and his parents never knew. And they never understood how it happened that when Christmas, came there were, after all, flippers and mask for Michael lying under the Christmas tree.



A Merry Christmas to all.

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