

The Golden Shells



By Isbah Faisal Ghaus

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Trip To The Beach

It was a pleasant Sunday morning. The golden rays of the sun shone brightly. I was lying on my bed, staring at my cream-coloured ceiling. After lazing around for a while, I went down the stairs to the dining room. That day, my parents had planned to go to the beach to have some fun. After eating a hearty breakfast, we started packing up some food and essentials for our trip.

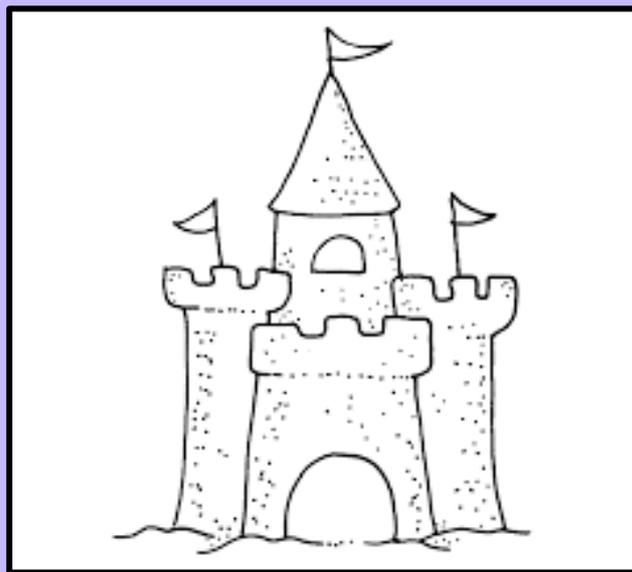
It was a ten - minute drive to the beach. When we reached, I was taken aback. The scene was magnificent. The water splashed playfully across the sand. The palm trees swayed gracefully in the distant sun. There were a few people wandering aimlessly on the beach. We laid our carpet down on the soft sand and went to play in the water.



We lost track of time and came back famished after playing for hours. We had scrumptious sandwiches and some homemade pink lemonade. It was very refreshing.

I started making sandcastles while my parents rested next to me. Something shiny caught my eye and I dug towards it to find what it was. It was a big, golden shell. I saw another one a little further away. I rushed to dig it, only to find that there were many of them going towards the water. Excitedly, I kept putting them in a cloth pouch that I had.

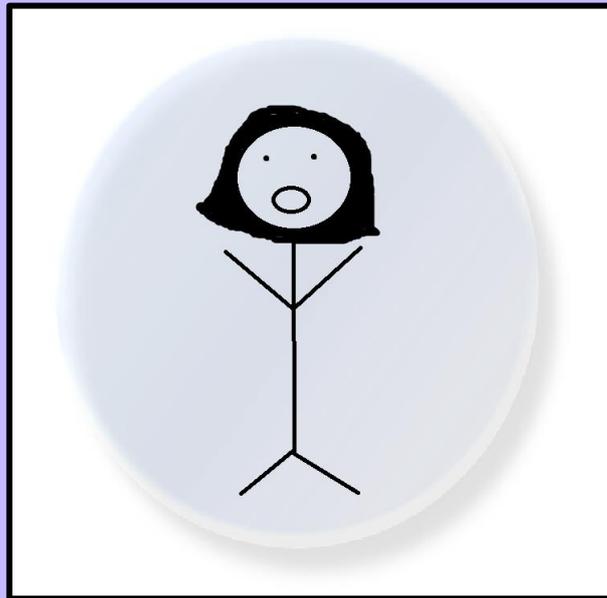
The water was slowly receding, and I didn't realize that I was going further and further towards it. All of a sudden, a wave swallowed me completely under water. I panicked and started screaming for my parents only to realize that I could breathe and talk under water. I was trapped in an air bubble that surrounded my entire body. Little did I know that it was the beginning of my underwater adventure.



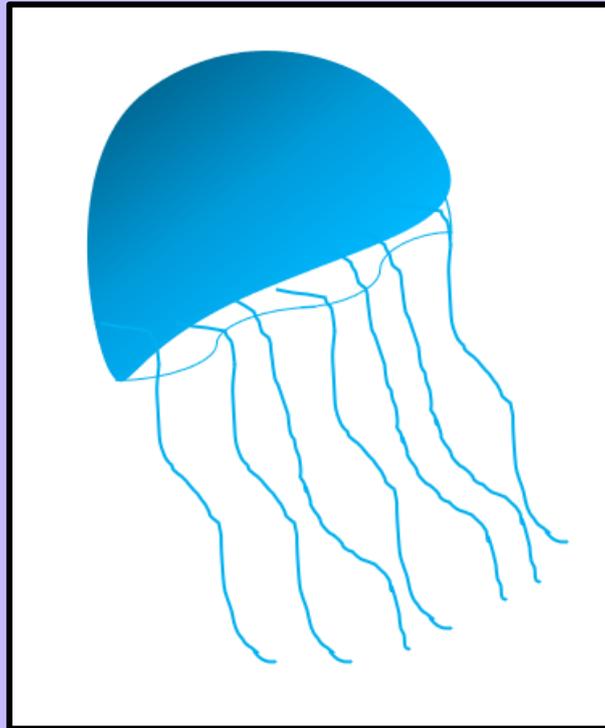
My Adventure Begins

My air bubble was taking me deeper into the sea. My head was spinning as I didn't understand what was going on. I longed for my parents and my cosy bed.

After some time, I saw a school of blue fish at some distance. They looked beautiful. I was mesmerised by the pretty patterns they made. I kept watching them for some time. All of a sudden, the fish started swimming in all directions. To my horror, a shark was coming towards me. My heart started pounding in my chest and my breathing stopped. I hoped that the shark would not see me. It turned towards the fish again, ate some of them and swam away. I thanked God for the narrow escape but now I was truly scared.



My bubble started moving again, and I was going deeper and deeper into the ocean. It was getting darker but to my surprise my bubble started glowing and I could see things around me. A moon jellyfish swam past me. My bubble protected me from its poisonous tentacles.



A few minutes later, I was able to see a beautiful coral reef. A few starfish and some marine animals were around it. I was nearing the seabed. I saw a faint outline of a ship at a distance. It was a sunken ship. My bubble started moving towards it. Even though my curiosity took over me, I didn't know what danger was lurking in the ship. Was there a big shark ready to eat me? Was there a swarm of eels ready to electrocute me the second they saw me? All I knew that I was in big trouble.

The Sunken Ship

The ship looked old and haunted. It had many cracks and was broken from everywhere. The sails were torn and ragged. It had a pirate flag, and the mast was shaped like a dragon. It would have been a majestic ship had it not sunk to the bottom of the sea.



My air bubble took me around the ship and hovered for a while as if trying to get into it. I entered through a door and all of a sudden, my bubble stopped glowing. It was pitch dark.

Soon I saw light and it started getting brighter and brighter. I could hear some noises too. To my horror, there were merpeople with long spears swimming all over the place. Three of them were guarding a treasure chest! How spooky! My bubble was taking me everywhere and I was surprised that no one was noticing me. Was I invisible to them?



Suddenly, a mermaid swam past me. Her long nails popped my bubble, and she could see me now. I was no longer invisible. I tried to move my legs to swim away from her, but I couldn't as I had a fish tail. I had also become a mermaid. I could speak and breathe underwater even without my bubble.

She caught me with one hand and pulled me. She took me through a path of twist and turns. We went through a blue portal and finally arrived at an underwater palace. It had tall pillars and high ceilings. The king was sitting on the golden throne with his queen who was on the silver throne. The king's voice boomed and created ripples in the water.

"Welcome to The City of Mertropolis. I am King Jules, the King of Mertropolis. This is Queen Mary. This city is where all merpeople live in harmony. Our humble home has never been found by anyone. You are the first human to come here. What is your name, dear girl?"

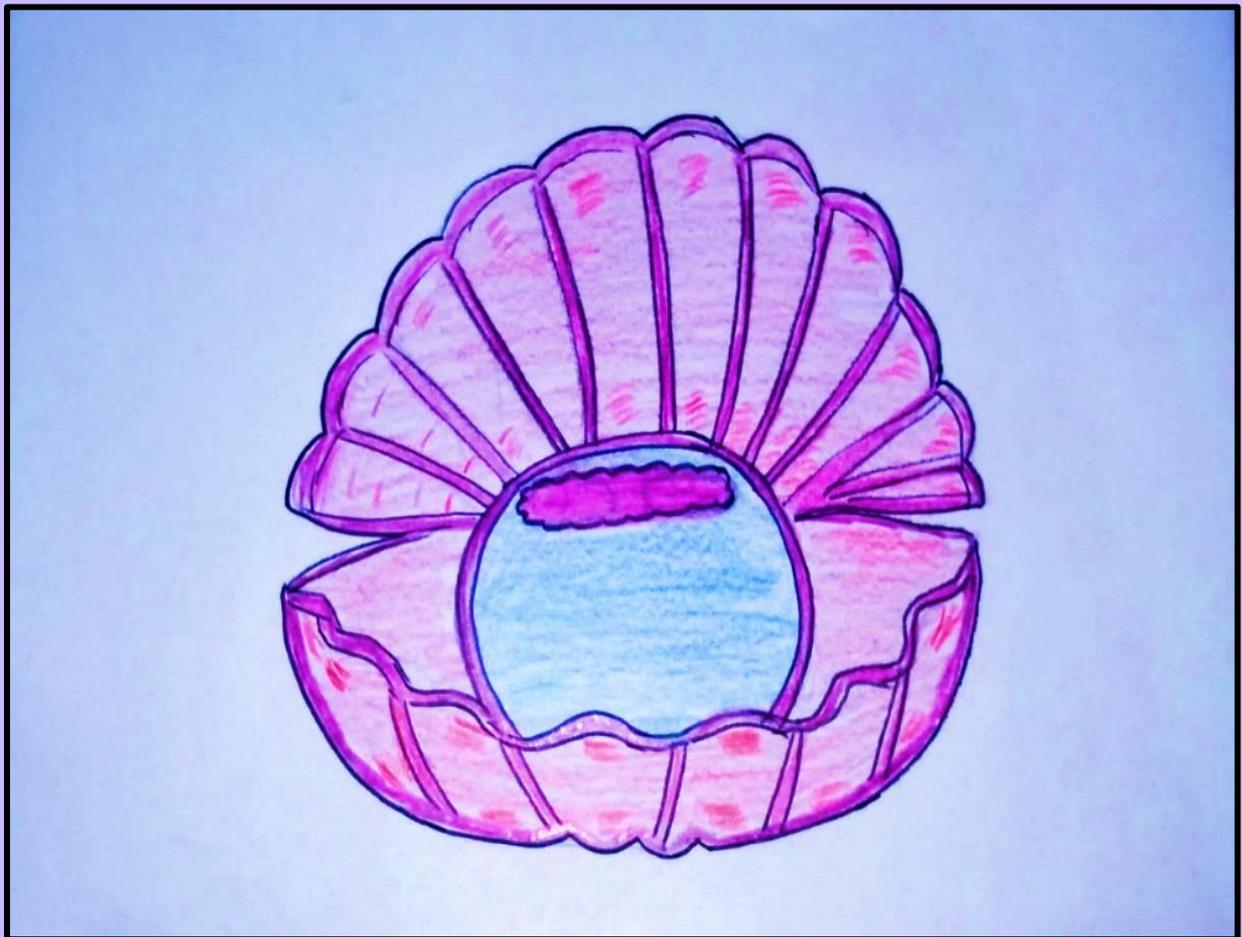
"My name is Emily."

"Emily, I am sure you have never seen the hospitality of the merpeople. Let us show you how good we are."

The Merpeople

I was taken to a beautiful room in the palace. There was a big oyster in the middle of the room but instead of a pearl, my bed was inside it.

There was some seaweed and fresh fish on a platter for me. I don't think they knew how we humans ate food. There were also some shimmering fruits in a bowl. Those fruits could only be found in the merworld. I picked one and ate it in a few bites. It tasted heavenly.



As I was tired, I went to sleep in the oyster bed wondering when I will be back on land with my parents. I started having nightmares that I was in the sea. I woke up with a start only to realise that it was true.

Soon, I heard hushed voices.

"Is she sleeping?"

"Yes."

"Good. Then, we need to prepare everything. We have waited for this day for such a long time. Let's lock her in this bed and we will be back when the time is right for her sacrifice."

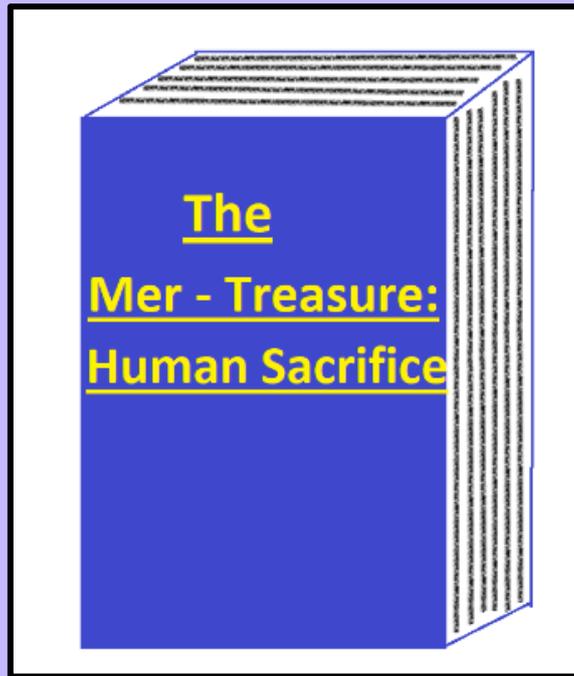
"Very well. Oyster, close your shell."

The oyster bed suddenly snapped closed around me. I jumped up and sat down. The Merpeople captured me!!

I was numb with fear. My sacrifice! What is going to happen to me? It seems that their hospitality was just a mask hiding their evil intentions.

I jerked back to reality and started looking for ways to get out of the oyster. I took a feather out of my pillow and started tickling the oyster from inside. The oyster was irritated and soon opened its shell. I was free.

I just needed to find a way to go back to land. I looked around the palace. The room next to mine was called the Royal Laboratory. I opened the door carefully. There were many bottles with weird fizzing potions in them. Some books were also lying scattered on the floor. The doors of cupboards swayed with the currents of the water, which it made it look haunted. The book nearest to me was called "The Mer - Treasure: Human Sacrifice". Its binding was intact but some of its pages were torn. I picked it up and hurriedly flipped it to the first page.

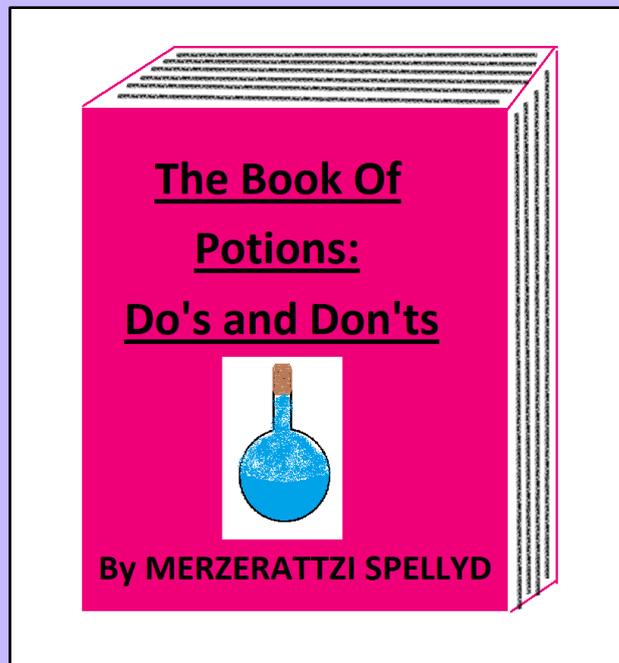


It was written that when a human will be sacrificed then the merpeople will get the treasure of Mertropolis. It also said that this treasure had been in Mertropolis for thousands of years, but it had not been opened till date, as no human had ventured into the realm of the merpeople.

I was unable to read the rest as I heard people coming towards the room. Quick as lightning, I put everything back in place and hid in a cupboard.

Potions

I peeped through the hole in the cupboard and I saw the king and queen standing in front of an old, dusty cupboard. The king took out a key from inside a vase while the queen was guarding the door. He opened the cupboard and took out a book called "The Book Of Potions: Do's and Don'ts" by Merzerattzi Spellyd.



From my hiding place, I was unable to read anything, but I heard them say that they need to look for the chapter about the "Draught of Death".

After reading the book for a painstaking five minutes, the King said to the Queen, "If you add five drops of the red potion to the blue potion, it will become poisonous and the girl will die. The Water Gods will be pleased with our sacrifice and we will finally get the "Trident of Destiny" from the treasure chest and rule the entire ocean."

The queen mixed the potions, and it became light purple. She put the potion in the cupboard and cackled evilly. The King also put the book back in the cupboard, locked it with the key and put the key inside the vase. They exited the room with smug looks on their faces.



As soon as they left, I jumped into action and came out of my hiding place and locked the door of the room. I unlocked the cupboard and took out the book and the potion. I flipped through the pages frantically trying to find a solution.

There was a chapter about a potion called the "Draught of Life" that would give power to the person to fulfil any one wish.

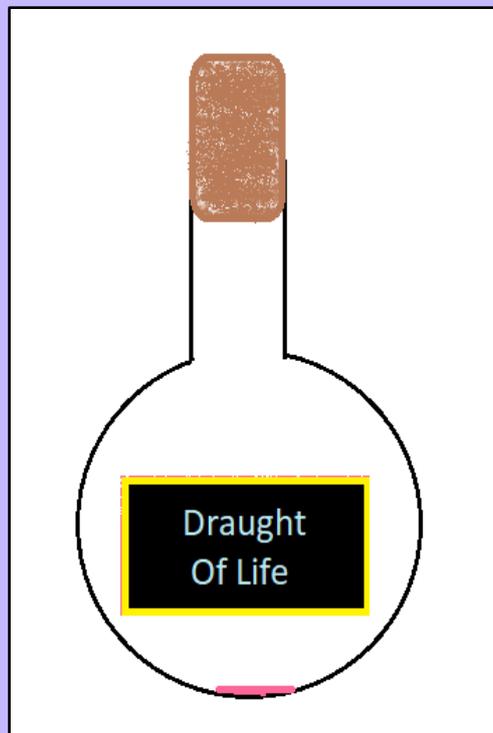
I desperately searched for the "Draught of Life" among all the other potions. I finally found the pink potion in a corner. I uncorked it and drank the full bottle wishing to go back home.

All of a sudden, the door burst open and a furious King and Queen were there with the guards. They started coming towards me. But at that exact moment, the potion started working and I started falling and falling and falling.



Back Home

I woke up on my bed gasping for breath. I was no longer underwater and was in my own house. I looked down to see that my mermaid tail had been replaced by two feet. Was my adventure all just a dream? I would have thought so, but the empty "Draught Of Life" bottle in my pocket and the golden shells in my pouch proved otherwise.



About The Author



Isbah Faisal Ghaus, the 9-year-old star of her ma and pa. Her nature is bubbly, and she does her work so cheerfully. An A lister to her brother and sister. With friends, shy at first, but eventually she loves to go blah blah blah. A fan of Asterix and Tintin, yet her first choice is a piggy called Peppa. She loves to travel near and far and will fill up a paper with colours and shiny stars.

WHAT MYSTERIES DOES THE OCEAN HOLD??

It all starts with a day on the beach. Emily and her parents are enjoying themselves on the beach. She finds a few shells and soon gets engulfed by the water. There she travels across the ocean in a bubble and has an experience like never before. She meets many creatures that one would never expect to find normally. But then her adventure is not normal either, is it??

*Can she escape the evil clutches
of the ocean and go back home??
Read to find out more.*