



The Awesome Aquarium Mystery!

by Carole Marsh

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First Edition

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About the Characters



Christina, age 10: Mysterious things really do happen to her! Hobbies: soccer, Girl Scouts, anything crafty, hanging out with Mimi, and going on new adventures.



Grant, age 7: Always manages to fall off boats, back into cactuses, and find strange clues—even in real life! Hobbies: camping, baseball, computer games, math, and hanging out with Papa.



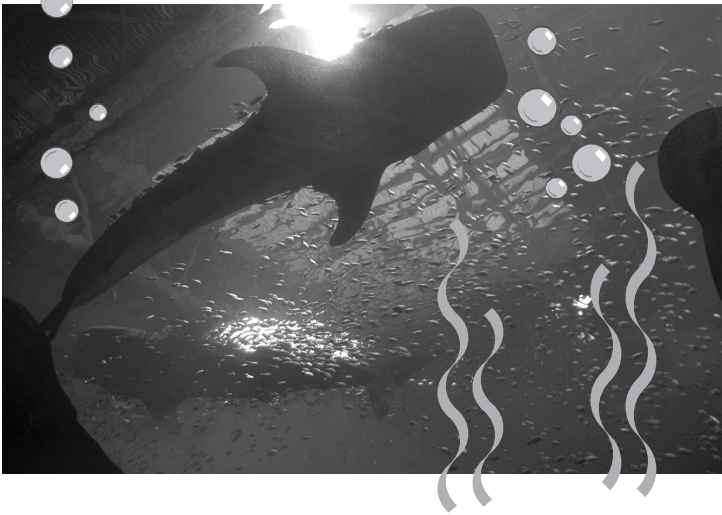
Mimi is Carole Marsh, children's book author and creator of *Carole Marsh Mysteries*, *Around the World in 80 Mysteries*, *Awesome Mysteries*, *Sportsmysteries*, and many others.



Papa is Bob Longmeyer, the author's real-life husband, who really does wear a tuxedo, cowboy boots and hat, fly an airplane, captain a boat, speak in a booming voice, and laugh a lot!

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One Fish, Two Fish

It was nine a.m. on the dot. Christina, Grant, Mimi, and Papa had timed ticket reservations to the grand opening of the new aquarium. “And, boy are we excited!” Grant kept repeating over and over and over to anyone who was listening...or not!

“I know you are excited, Grant,” said his sister, Christina, age 10, “but can you think of just one other thing to say...please.”

Grant stood on one foot and then the other, waiting exceedingly impatiently for the doors to open and allow them into the brand-spanking new aquarium. It was a little damp and chilly, but that was not what was bothering Grant. First

and foremost, he really was just plain too excited to stand still...and secondly, he really, really had to go to the bathroom.

“Those fish have it made,” Grant finally said.

“What does that mean?” his sister asked, perplexed.

“You don’t want to know,” Grant said, squirming more and more.

Papa reached down and patted both his grandchildren on their fleece-capped heads. “Just be patient a little longer,” he pleaded. He understood that excited seven-year-olds didn’t have much patience. “The doors will open any minute; I promise. After all, I need a cup of coffee.”

“Don’t talk about anything liquid, please,” pleaded Grant.

“It’s an aquarium, Grant,” said his sister. “It’s all about liquid.”

“Patience, patience,” Papa said. “The doors will open any minute.”

And as if he had cast a magic spell, the doors to the new aquarium did open. The lucky ticketholders waiting out in the drizzling rain cheered.

“We’re pretty near the front of the line,” said

Mimi. "It won't take us too long to get inside." Their grandmother swiped at her hair, which was getting curlier by the minute. "I hope!" she added. "Or I will look just like Little Orphan Annie, and what will the fish think of that?"

Grant and Christina giggled. Their grandmother Mimi was a famous children's mystery book writer. Papa was her Big Helper. She had promised that she was just visiting the new aquarium, and had no plans to write a new mystery book. But Grant and Christina knew better.

They had traveled all around the world with Mimi and Papa. Sometimes on airplanes (including Papa's little red and white *Mystery Girl*)...sometimes on trains...or by car...or even rickshaw—and no matter what Mimi said, she *always* wrote a mystery book about their adventures.

Papa held a colorful umbrella he had bought in Paris down lower over Mimi's head as they slowly snaked forward in the line. "So you're not going to write a mystery?" he asked Mimi with a smile. "That sounds very fishy to me."

"VERY fishy!" Christina and Grant agreed.

"Well, what would I write about?" asked

Mimi, grumpily. She was tired and cold and missing her coffee.

Just then, they came to the head of the line. Papa handed the smiling ticket-taker their tickets and they walked inside. As soon as they got inside the door, they all stopped dead in their tracks and looked up, down, and all around.

“Whoa,” said Grant. “Maybe you could write about THIS!”

THIS was the newest aquarium to open in America. It was a whopper! In fact, it was proclaimed to be the world’s largest aquarium. It was beautiful—especially the dramatic welcoming atrium. They all gasped as they walked past tanks of fish called blue runners. The decorated entrances to the various galleries beckoned invitingly. An interactive wall exhibit let you identify fish by touching a screen as they swam by.

It was clear that the entire place was filled with the latest aquarium technology. It was filled with enormous tanks of water. And it was chockfull of absolutely awesome and fascinating fish. They truly did not know where to begin.

So, needless to say, each of them pointed in a different direction and cried, "Let's go this way!"

Papa laughed. "Where do you want to go, Christina?"

"Let's visit the biggest tank of all, first," she begged. She pointed in one direction where many people were heading toward a gallery called Ocean Voyager.

"How about you?" Papa asked Grant.

Grant squirmed his legs together and pointed to a small door off to the side. "How about there first?" he suggested urgently. Grant pointed to the bathroom.

Mimi nodded and Grant ran off.

"Great!" said Christina. "We wait two years to come to the most famous and humongous aquarium of all time, and I have to spend the first ten minutes waiting for..."

Before she could finish her sentence, her brother reappeared.

"Wow!" his sister said. "That must be an all time record."

"I was in a hurry," her brother said. "I don't want to miss anything."

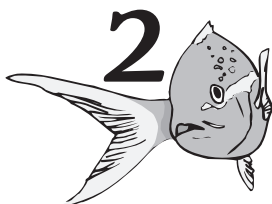
"Those fish aren't going anywhere," Papa said. "Let's take our time and enjoy our first

visit. There's so much to see, I doubt we can see it all in one day anyway." He began to twist and turn to look all around. "Where is she?" he muttered. Mimi had already disappeared. She was more fourth-grader than grandmother and they all knew they would have a hard time keeping up with her.

Christina and Grant giggled.

"Mimi's gone walkabout, I think," said Christina.

Papa sighed. "Well, let's try to catch up," he said. Follow me, and let's don't get lost from one another for a change. Ok? Ok?? OK???" He turned around to find that he was standing all alone. "Oh, brother," he said to no one in particular. "Let the mystery adventure begin!"



Red Fish, Blue Fish

No one knew where Mimi had gone. Grant sped off to the touch tanks. He really liked to get up-close-and-personal with sea life. Papa headed for the cafeteria to grab a cup of hot coffee. Christina walked to the center of the atrium and froze in her tracks.

As people buzzed around her, headed in different directions, and chatting with excitement, Christina just stood there in awe. All around her, as well as above and below, were sights and sounds that intrigued her.

Christina loved lights, and sounds, and colors, and action—and the new aquarium's gigantic entrance hall engaged all her senses. She could

hardly take her eyes off an overhead wavy screen showing enormous sea life go by. Entranceways to various parts of the aquarium had special display signs. Each one was bright and entertaining and made her want to rush to all of them at the same time.

The room seemed to be filled with blue and light and the musical sound of the sea. It's just like a dream, she thought to herself. It's beautiful! And I haven't even seen the fish yet, she marveled. She decided that she must look lost because a nice man with an official aquarium tag on his shirt tapped her on the shoulder, and when she spun around, he asked, "Are you lost?"

Christina blushed and giggled. "I don't think so, thank you," she said. "I just got here, and I...I..." She realized that she was speechless and could not explain herself.

Now the man laughed heartily. "I know just how you feel, young lady," he admitted. He waved his arms in an arc over his head to indicate the entire aquarium. "I've been watching this place come to life for more than two years, and I'm still astounded every time I step inside."

Christina looked puzzled. "You've been here

for two years?" she said. "I thought the aquarium just opened today."

"Sorry to confuse you," the man said. He stood up very tall. "I guess you could say that I was sort of the reason...or in charge of...or, well, I've been around since this aquarium was just a little minnow of an idea."

Christina was very impressed. "Then I guess this must be a really big day for you," she said.

"Oh, yes," said the man. "It's like Christmas and my birthday, and loads of other holidays all in one—only better!" He laughed again. "I could take you on a little tour," he offered. "Where is the rest of your family?"

Christina looked around and sighed. "Oh, we got separated right away," she said. "But I would be thrilled if you could point me in the right direction—like maybe to your very favorite part of the aquarium."

The man smiled. "Then let's sit right here," he said, indicating a bench nearby.

They sat down and the man began to tell Christina about the different parts of the aquarium. He talked very fast and with excitement and enthusiasm.

"Now if you want to learn about the coast, you

can head that way,” he said, waving an arm at a large lighthouse. “And if you like river creatures, that area will show you some amazing things!” He pointed to an entrance that looked like it led into a special effects movie set for a jungle or rainforest.

Christina nodded and the man continued. “Where you see the snow on the rocks, you can go and see some incredible cold water sea life. And over there is a great barrier reef that’s absolutely gorgeous!”

By now, Christina was getting both excited and confused. Then the man surprised her by whispering almost reverently: “See that entrance?” He pointed a finger at a dark area across the hall from where they sat.

Christina nodded again, eager to hear what the man had to say. “Well, that,” he said proudly, “is the doorway to the most amazing thing you’ll see in this aquarium!” He leaned down and whispered in her ear. “You don’t want to miss it...but I won’t spoil the surprise by telling you any more. And of course you have to see the really cool 3-D movie and get a delicious snack in the cafeteria, and...”

Before he could continue, an aquarium staff

person ran up to the man. "Excuse me, sir," he said urgently. "Uh, I'm afraid..." he looked at Christina, then lowered his voice. "I'm afraid we have a situation." He said the word more like SITUATION, as if to emphasize that he needed help right away.

The nice man patted Christina on her head like she was a little kid. "Gotta go," he said. "Have fun and perhaps I'll see you later and can hear your impressions of your great new aquarium."

Christina looked puzzled. "My aquarium?" she asked, confused.

"It's a gift," the man said with a big smile. "Enjoy it!" And then he hurried off with the other man.

With a sigh, Christina sat there a moment longer, wondering which way to go and where to start. Usually when faced with such a decision, she did eeny, meenie, miney, mo...or one potato, two potato...but this time she said aloud, as she pointed to each entrance... "One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish. Ok! Looks like I'm headed for that special door over there."

She shivered with excitement, jumped up and headed across the busy hall, dodging baby

strollers, little kids, big parents, and aquarium volunteers. As she peered across the hall to find her way, she noticed that the nice man and the aquarium staffer had just rushed into that very entrance—the sign said Ocean Voyager: Journey with Giants.

A SITUATION, she thought. I wonder what that's all about? My aquarium, she thought. I wonder what he meant? And I wonder where Papa, and Mimi, and Grant are? And I wonder...

But all of a sudden, Christina forgot to wonder because she was suddenly filled with wonder as she entered a...tunnel of water!



Tunnel of Water

“Woooooow!” Christina said as she stared overhead. Above her, fish great and small, seemed to sail through a sky of water.

“Boy, howdy, wow!” said a deep voice behind her. Christina would know that voice anywhere—it was Papa.

“Whoopie, kai-yai WOW!” screeched a young voice. Christina giggled. That could only be Grant.

“Woooooooooooooow!” drawled a soft Southern voice. Mimi put her hands on Christina’s shoulders. “What do you think of this?” she asked.

“I think I wonder if we have family ESP* to all wind up at the same place at the same time,” said Christina. “And I think this is almost like

*Extra Sensory Perception

being in the water with the fishes. It's so cool!"

"COOL!" repeated Grant, who had his nose pressed to the wall of glass as a large grouper surrounded by a cloud of small gold fish silently swam by.

Everyone in the tunnel seemed enthralled with this unique view of the fish. A school of manta rays sailed overhead. Then suddenly, two large shadows appeared out of nowhere. In spite of herself, Christina ducked. The two monstrous fish swam overhead and vanished off into the murky water. Another cloud of the little gold fish whisked past them.

"What was that?!" said Grant. "Giant sharks?"

Mimi shuttered. "I hope not," she said. Mimi did not like things with lots of arms or legs or teeth.

"I don't think they were sharks," said Papa.

"Well, what were they?" Christina asked. She thought Papa knew, but was not telling. He always wanted his grandkids to figure out things on their own. He said that's how you learned to research and to do critical thinking, as he called it.

Papa nudged the others forward through the tunnel. "I think if we keep going, we just might

find out,” he said.

As much as she hated to leave, Christina led them out of the tunnel and into a dark passageway. “Why is it so dark?” she asked. “It makes it sort of spooky...like a haunted aquarium.”

“It’s kept dark for the fish,” Mimi explained. “Plus I think it actually helps us see them better.”

“It’s all about the fish, right?” Grant asked.

“It’s an aquarium!” Christina reminded her brother.

“It’s all about the fish to me,” said Papa.

Christina giggled. “But you always say that, Papa. Especially when we go out to eat seafood.”

Papa put his finger to his lips. “SHHHHH!” he hissed, pointing at the fish in the next tank window. “I don’t want them to think I’m the enemy.”

The kids giggled and stood on tiptoes to admire the fish. Christina was torn between reading all the information about the unique and often colorful fish, and moving on to the next tank she was so eager to see.

Slowly, they moved from tank to tank, enjoying the fish...and enjoying seeing little kids

ooh and *aah* over the fish. Perhaps that's why Christina was not expecting what happened next. She still was at the front of their group when she turned a sharp corner in the darkened passage. And suddenly she came face-to-face with what looked like the entire sea!

Christina stared up at the most gigantic window of glass that she had ever seen. It looked as big as a football field to her. "This must be the biggest fish tank ever!" she said.

An aquarium staffer nearby laughed. "Almost," he said. "This is the second largest aquarium tank window in the world. It's 28 feet tall and 63 feet wide. That's 8.5 meters and 19.2 meters, if you're into metrics," he added.

Grant groaned. "Oh, I'm into metrics," he said. "It's on my next test...the one I haven't studied for."

"What a view!" Mimi cried. "It's like looking right out to sea...or rather I mean it's like looking right out INTO the sea."

"And what do you see in our sea?" the aquarium staffer asked.

Obviously, there were lots of fish in the six million gallon tank. Christina looked around at the hammerhead sharks, sawfish, groupers, and

skates. Schools of golden trevally swept by. An unusual bowmouth guitarfish swooped right in front of them.

But suddenly Christina knew why he had asked them that question at that specific moment. For, magically, out of the far reaches of the water appeared a dark shadow that soon turned into an enormous fish. It looked as big as a school bus! And before they all could gasp in glee, another dark polka-dotted shadow, surrounded by a host of the bright gold fish, came forward into full majestic view.

“What are they?” Grant asked in awe.

The staffer stood taller and announced proudly: “They are Ralph and Norton!”