

# Sydney

## and the shipwreck

### Chapter one: Safe in school

Sydney had a habit of getting lost. No matter how many times his parents and teachers told him to be careful, he would still swim away to explore something new.

'But the sea is a really BIG place,' he would say. 'And there are so many cool things to see.'

Sydney's curiosity had got him into trouble many, many times, and today – the day of the school trip – Sydney was going to get into trouble yet again.

'Come on class, keep up!' called Miss Finn, as she darted through the brightly-coloured coral. Behind her, 50 silver, shimmering bodies all hurried after her, forked tails whipping back and forth.

Sydney was at the back, with his best friend Jake. They were talking about all the adventures they were going to have when they were bigger, stronger and faster, just like the grown-ups.

'I'm going to explore the whole reef,' said Sydney. 'It just goes on and on forever. I wonder what we'll find at the end of it.'

'A big fish that will gobble you up!' laughed Jake.

'I'm too fast to catch. No big fish will gobble me up.'

Jake nudged his friend. 'You're a slow-coach. I've seen clams move faster than you.'

'Okay, I'll race you,' said Sydney – who never liked being told he was slow. 'See that purple sea fan over there...'

'Yeah,' said Jake. 'That's pretty far. If Miss Finn notices we'll be in real trouble.'

'Oh come on,' insisted Sydney, 'We'll be there and back in no time, and can catch up with the rest of the school then. Miss Finn has eyes



on the *side* of her head, not at the back!

Jake giggled. 'Okay, you're right. Ready, steady... GO!'

Both fish broke away from the school and started diving down towards the coral floor, their silver bodies whizzing over the swaying fronds and tubular sponges. Ahead was the purple sea fan, its wide finger-like leaves drifting back and forth in the steady current. As always, Sydney was leading the way.

'I'm going to win!' he called back to Jake. He kicked his tail, driving himself forward at even greater speed.

Then... all of a sudden, something huge and white swung out from behind a rocky wall. It was moving quickly, straight for them... and as it closed, a massive set of jaws opened wide, revealing razor-sharp teeth.

'Shark!' screamed Jake, waving his fins frantically. 'Quickly hide!' Jake swung round and headed for the nearest outcropping of rock. There were plenty of nooks and crannies there to hide.

But Sydney was going too fast to stop. He was heading straight for the shark's enormous mouth.

'Help!' he cried.

But, of course, there was no one to help him. Miss Finn and the rest of the school were far away now.

Fear gave Sydney the extra burst of speed he needed. Kicking his tail furiously, he swung out his pectoral fins, turning smoothly to the side. The shark's jaws snapped closed with a loud CRACK!

... but the shark had missed his dinner. Sydney had dodged aside at just the right moment, taking him speeding past the creature's angry black eyes and giant gills.

'Please don't eat me,' squealed Sydney, racing away as fast as he could. He caught movement behind him, and heard the loud snapping jaws getting close... the shark was chasing him.

Sydney was lost. Again. He didn't recognise this area of the reef – he didn't know where was safe to hide.

And then he saw it. A strange black shape that loomed out of the darker waters ahead. It was large and looked like nothing Sydney had ever seen before. The good news was that it wasn't moving... and had no teeth. In fact, it looked like a great place to hide.



Quickly, Sydney zipped through the waters towards the strange shape and dived between a narrow crack in its side, disappearing into the dark interior.

In the cold darkness, Sydney waited... and waited. And then waited some more... When he felt sure the shark had gone, he peeked out. And gave a little shriek of fright! The shark was still there, circling around in the waters...

'I'm trapped here!' cried Sydney.

## Chapter two: Light and dark

Several hours had passed and the shark was still swimming back and forth, its huge teeth gleaming in the half-light.

'I'll never get home,' cried Sydney, who was peeking out from his hidey-hole. 'Miss Finn and the others will be wondering where I am!'

'Don't worry,' whispered a voice from the dark.

Sydney gave a yelp of surprise. 'Who said that?' he asked quickly, twisting around.

Suddenly the dark space was filled with a brilliant white light. For a moment, Sydney was blinded. As his eyes slowly adjusted to the light, he began to make out the shape of a much larger fish. It had a purple face, and wide, down-turned lips. The bright light was coming from the skin underneath its eyes.

'You're not going to eat me are you?' asked Sydney worriedly.

'Don't be ridiculous,' snapped the strange fish. 'Why would I want to eat something as ugly as you?'

Sydney wasn't sure if he should be feeling relief or anger. He settled for a meek 'Thank you.' The fish continued to watch him, its spotlights aimed directly at Sydney.

'Can you turn those off, they really hurt my eyes,' he said irritably.

'Of course,' said the fish. A second later and there was darkness.

'What's your name?' asked Sydney, directing his question to the inky black.

'Lampe,' came the reply. 'I'm a Flashlight fish.'

'A what?' said Sydney. 'I never heard of one of them before.'

'Well I wasn't expecting you to have. We prefer the very deepest, darkest depths of the ocean. But I got bored of the dark and the cold



and decided to come up here to the reef, to explore.'

'Really? I love exploring too!'

'Is that so?' said Lampe. 'Well, wait until night falls and then hopefully our shark friend will have gone. He isn't known for his patience. He'll get bored and swim away, looking for his next meal.'

'But I suppose... I really *should* be going home,' said Sydney, his thoughts turning to his family and friends.

'Best to wait until the morning,' said Lampe. 'The reef is even more dangerous at night. We can stay here and use my lights to explore. There are plenty of places to hide if we run into trouble.'

'Okay,' said Sydney with a smile. 'This could be really fun!'

### **Chapter three:** The snapper

Lampe and Sydney spent all night exploring the mysterious shipwreck. When morning came, and the ocean was filled once again with a warm sparkling radiance, Sydney decided it was time he headed for home.

'Thank you Lampe,' he said. 'I really enjoyed exploring the... what did you call it again?'

'A shipwreck,' said Lampe.

'Ah yes, a shipwreck!' Sydney flitted between the floating debris. 'It was a good place to explore; so much to see!'

Lampe's lips lifted into a smile. 'Well good luck Sydney, I hope you find your way home.'

'Thank you!' Sydney watched as Lampe swam away across the reef. He was really pleased to have made a new friend. With a swish of his tail, Sydney spun round and prepared to head for home...

BOOM!!

Sydney was brought up short by a momentary flash of white light. For a second he thought it was Lampe playing a trick on him. But it wasn't – there, floating in front of him was a really big fish... at least he thought it was a fish. But no... this *thing* had arms and legs, two big lumps on its back and duck-like flippers on its feet. It was the strangest, ugliest thing that Sydney had ever seen.



As Sydney watched, the 'thing' turned around on the spot and raised a box-like object to another passing fish. Again, there was a bright flash.

'Ah, good photo!' mumbled a voice from somewhere behind the goggle-like visor.

Sydney turned and immediately swam back into his hide-out. He wasn't sure if this stranger meant him harm or not. He decided to watch for a while to make sure.

## Chapter four: Pieces of the past

'What are you seeing?' crackled the voice in Peter's ear.

'A three-masted sailing ship,' he replied, kicking his flippers to propel himself across the face of the wreck. 'I can see a name here.'

'What does it say?' asked the voice. It was Peter's wife, who was on the motorboat, floating 200 feet above.

Peter swam nearer and brushed the dirt and sand from the iron plaque. 'The Victorian,' he read. He snatched a piece of tattered cloth that was floating nearby. Holding it up to his visor, he saw it was a lace-trimmed shawl. 'I think we're looking at late 1800s,' he said.

'Good,' crackled the voice. 'Can you see if there is a log book?'

'Okay!' Using his hands Peter pulled himself down, towards where there was an opening in the side of the ship. Pushing himself through the narrow space he found himself inside a small cabin. Numerous charts and books were floating around the space – bouncing off the curved, wooden walls. Swimming over to the table that dominated much of the cabin, Peter spotted an iron-bound chest underneath.

He reached down and took hold of it. Most of its surface was caked in muddy grit and rust. With effort he managed to push open the lid. Inside was a red, leather-bound book.

'I think I found it,' said Peter, carefully flicking through the pages. Most of them looked ruined – the wet ink having run into indecipherable patterns. But some still looked readable.

'Okay, I'm coming back up,' said Peter. 'I think the book I found will give us some clues to who was on board and where it was headed.'



## Chapter five: Searching for Sydney

Jake and the other fish were worried about Sydney. He had been missing for a long, long time now and everyone was expecting the worst. Even Miss Finn was feeling bad.

'I should have been looking out for him,' she said. 'It's really all my fault.'

'He'll have been eaten for sure,' said Sydney's little brother, Cedric. 'No one survives a night on the reef alone.'

Everyone agreed. Everyone that is, except for Jake.

'Sydney is fast and clever,' he said. 'He will have found somewhere good to hide from the shark. We should go looking for him.'

Miss Finn gave a murmur of approval. 'We should at least try, I suppose.'

'But where will we start? The reef is a huge place,' said Cedric. 'Sydney could be anywhere.'

'We should start with Samson,' said Miss Finn. 'He's the wisest animal on the reef. He will know where Sydney is.'

'Of course!' cried Jake. 'Samson the sea turtle! He knows everything!'

'Well, what are we waiting for?' said Cedric. 'Let's go find him.'

## Chapter six: Party in the park

Sydney was home at last – safe and sound.

'I promise to be more careful in future,' he said to Miss Finn.

The teacher rolled her big bulbous eyes. 'Hmm, I think I've heard that before, young fish... but it's good to see you back. Now stay out of trouble, do you hear me?'

'Of course,' grinned Sydney, giving his friend Jake a sideways wink.

'Come on,' said Jake. 'I'll race you to the coral park.'

Before Sydney could reply, Jake flicked his tail and sped off through the water.

'Hey, that's not fair!' called Sydney. 'You got a head start!'

'Come on you hermit crab, you're too slow,' laughed Jake.

Flapping his fins furiously, Sydney took off in pursuit, his thin body skimming the coral floor. Jake was almost out of sight now – but Sydney was determined to catch him up. 'I'll show him!'



As Sydney cleared a high outcropping, lined with gently swaying sea fans, he caught sight of the coral park below.

'Oh... Wow!' he gasped.

It was full of fish and other coral animals, all gathered together underneath a big banner. It read 'Welcome home Sydney!'

Jake appeared at his side, grinning broadly. 'Surprise!'

Sydney was speechless, his mouth opening and closing like a goldfish in a bowl.

'Come on, we have food and music,' said Jake. 'Let's celebrate in style!'

For once, Sydney did exactly what he was told, and followed his friend down towards the waiting party...

**Story by Michael Ward**

