

# Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



10.

## Rendezvous

It was an afternoon for smooth sailing, a time when the wind blew the captain's sac where he wanted, and the waves rocked his jelly gently.

Beneath him, the sea teemed with life. Along the way, he spotted grumpy-looking codfish and armies of silver herring that flashed like new dimes each time they turned. He gave a wide berth to a team of harbor seals and glared disapprovingly at four flounder lounging on the silty seabed.

Later, the captain called, "Good day," to an octopus who was pulling his way over a pile of rocks.

The eight-armed creature stopped to salute and salute and salute and salute.

"That will do, good fellow," John Paul said impatiently. "I'm searching for my fleet. Have you sighted any jellyfish in the vicinity?"

The octopus, apparently befuddled by the appearance of a sea captain above him, managed only to shrug and shrug and shrug and shrug, and by the time he was through shrugging, John Paul had sailed on by.

Toward nightfall, a school of tuna crossed the captain's path. He hailed them and inquired again about his fleet's whereabouts.

"It's a modest-size fleet," he explained. "Twenty-four hands strong...sea nettles mostly, yet in a variety of colors...one brawny moon jelly, as well, the best of the bunch...I suppose they'd be hard to tell apart from any other group of jellies on the coast, except by their accents...We hail from England, you see...the first jellyfish fleet ever to sail the Atlantic."

"Outta the way, Mac!" one tuna in the school shouted.

"Can't you see we're in a hurry?" cried another.

"Hey, watch where you dangle those tentacles, dude," said a third.

The captain shook his jelly bell. "I never knew tuna were such rude fish," he said. "Is that what happens when you stay in a school too long?"

Not a jellyfish to be discouraged easily, John Paul next approached a sperm whale that was sunning himself on the surface.

"Good day, Great Spout," he called out.

The whale let out a geyser from his topside. "Call me, Ish," he replied. "And thank ye, mate."

"Thank you, Mr. Ish?" the captain asked. "I don't understand."

The whale spouted again. "Thanks for not hollering *thar she blows* when you spotted me, mate," he explained. "That's what all the blokes around here cry, *thar she blows, thar she blows*, every time I spout. It's a bit of a joke, and I'm bloody well tired of it."

"I understand, Mr. Ish," said John Paul. "Tell me, if you please, have you been sailing in these waters long?"

"Aye, I have, mate," answered the whale. "And who'll be asking?"

"I'm Captain John Paul Jellyfish out of Plymouth, England."

The whale's big eyes grew bigger. "Well, blimey!" he said. "I've heard of you, mate. The name John Paul Jellyfish is mentioned by every deep-sea sailor around Europe. You're the bloke who led the British fleet to victory against the Portuguese men-of-war a few years back, ain't ye?"

The captain shuddered at the memory of that terrible battle. "Much jelly was spilled that day," he replied. "My crew did themselves proud."

"Will you listen to him? What humility!" said the whale. "Why, I heard tell that you were outnumbered in that battle three to one, captain. A fierce tentacle-to-tentacle engagement that one was. I heard tell that if it weren't for your quick wit and cunning, those men-of-war would have sunk the entire British navy. Say, don't they have a nickname for you, captain? *Old Ironsides!* That's what they call you. They say your jelly sac must be as tough as iron to have survived so much fighting without being punctured."

"Indeed," the captain said dryly. How well he knew that his skin was as thin as cellophane.

"Well, blow me down!" the whale blubbered on. "It's an honor to meet ye, captain. Aye, a right honor indeed. So whither ye bound?"

"I'm in pursuit of an unknown peril," John Paul explained. "But it appears, Mr. Ish, for the moment I've lost my fleet."

"You don't say. Why that's a bloody shame, Captain. But I seen a bunch of jellies sail by here bout an hour ago. A yellow sea nettle was in command. Doing a bloody poor job of it, though. Could they be yours, Captain?"

"That's them," John Paul said. "What were their bearings, Mr. Ish?"

The whale flipped his broad tail toward shore. "Headed for that harbor yonder. In a bloody hurry, they were."

This was welcome news indeed. The harbor was close and John Paul was weary. "Very good, Mr. Ish. Now I must be shoving off. Cheerio!"

"Fare thee well, John Paul Jellyfish," called the whale. "May luck stay with you, *Old Ironsides*."

As the captain sailed for shore, the whale honored him with a ten-spout salute.

"*Thar she blows!*" cried every fish in the area.

Within the hour, John Paul steered into the small harbor. Careful to avoid the sailboats slipping in and out of the harbor's narrow entrance, he cruised toward a wooden dock on the lee shore. Beneath the dock, behind a barnacle-encrusted piling, he found his fleet anchored.

"Lieutenant! I'm back!" the captain barked. "Mr. Brown! Anything to report?"

"Affirmative-o, Cap'n," the first mate said. "We encountered the enemy."

A cold lump formed in John Paul's jelly. "The Portuguese?" he snarled. "Here, on this coast?"

"Right-o, Cap'n. Fifty, maybe sixty men-o'-war," the moon jelly said. "They chased us into this harbor."

"Sir," the lieutenant spoke up. "During the chase, two of the crew--pink nettles they were, sir--deserted the fleet, sir."

The captain swelled with rage. "Fools!" he rasped. "Those jelly bellies won't last a day on their own. So, Lieutenant, the enemy knows we are in here?"

The yellow sea nettle confirmed this with a tip of his sac.

The captain cast a look toward the harbor's mouth. "Bags!" he cursed under his breath. "An entire armada of Portuguese men-of-war! And they have us trapped in this place like sitting ducks."

