

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



14.

An Old Blue Lobster

PHOOOOT! PHOOOOT! PHOOOOT!

Three short blasts from the ship's horn shook Captain John Paul Jellyfish from his dreams. This was all the warning he had before the tall iron wall beside him began to move.

"All hands! Weigh anchors!" the captain cried. "Turn out! Cast off! Get cracking! Swim for it, lads!"

From somewhere close, people cheered. Dots of colored paper rained upon the ocean.

Long streamers fell. The water began to bubble, and the great hull of the *Queen Mary II* pulled out of its berth.

At first, the ship moved slowly. It took tremendous power to get 150,000 tons of ocean liner, the length of four football fields, to push through water. The massive engines thundered. The gigantic propellers churned the water into a boiling froth.

Fortunately, by this time, the jellyfish fleet was floating a safe distance out in the harbor. As the long length of the ship passed them, John Paul remarked to his officers, "Notice her stern, gentlemen. She flies the colors of our country."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the lieutenant, still half asleep.

"Right-o, Cap'n," replied the groggy first mate.

Then the three jellyfish tried their best to salute the Union Jack while rocking wildly in the wake of the *QM2*, now steaming full throttle out to sea.

With the turning of the tide an hour away, the captain decided to explore the vast port. However, clouds of soapsuds, floating garbage, and more smelly rainbows hindered the way. Below the surface was even worse. John Paul stared in disgust at old tires, shopping carts, car parts, bottles, cans of all kinds, and a few old chests of tea.

At length, the fleet approached a long cement wharf. Among the stacks of plastic crates, lobster pots, Dumpsters, and parked trucks sat old men with fishing poles.

John Paul Jellyfish studied the nylon fishing lines dangling from the poles. "I'm curious what's happening on the other end of those lines," he told his officers, and he plunged below the surface.

There, the captain spotted something disturbing. Crouched next to a hook at the end of a fishing line was a large, blue lobster. He had a claw raised, and as nimbly as a safecracker, was plucking the bait off the hook. When the hook was clean, a flip of its fan tail sent the lobster gliding backward to the next line in the row. He set about robbing this one in the same manner. So expertly did he clean each hook, without the slightest tug on the line, that the anglers topside never suspected that they hadn't a chance in the world of catching any fish today.

"You there, lobster," John Paul called. "Living off easy pickings can get you hooked."

The lobster's small, beady eyes, set on the end of short, stalks, turned upward. "Well now, me hearty," he said, spotting the sea nettle hovering above him. "Life in the city is not easy, don't you know. A poor lobster needs to eat somehow."

"And what, may I ask, prevents you from hunting in the deep like an honest crustacean?" asked John Paul.

By way of an answer, the blue lobster raised a shortened front limb from which the claw was missing. "Notice me stump, Cappy," he said. "Lost me pincher a while ago in a fight with a Great White, don't you know. Aye, me and that monstrous shark wrestled for hours, we did. Gave the brute a good fight, too. But he made off with me crushing claw between his teeth just the same."

"Come, come, my blue friend," said the captain. "I'm fully aware of a lobster's handy ability to grow a new claw after losing one."

"Well, now, Cappy," said the lobster. "Ain't ye smarter than the average jellyfish who strays into Boston Harbor? So there's no use reminding you that we blue-colored lobsters are a rare breed and deserve a certain amount of respect. Why, only one in every ten million lobsters turns out blue, don't you know."

John Paul chuckled. "I believe the odds are more like one in every two million. Still, that's no reason to hang around these wharves scavenging like a seagull."

"Easy for a jellyfish to say, Cappy," said the lobster. "You don't have a fleet of lobster men after your tail. But I've served me time in the depths, don't you know."

Aye, I've hunted with the best of lobsters. You don't grow to be my size living in foul water, eating fish bait."

The captain watched a bare fish hook shoot upward and return shortly with a fresh shrimp on its end. He studied the lobster some more before saying, "Well, you seem like an able-bodied and resourceful sea creature. The fact is, my fleet has a powerful enemy after our sacs. Your experience and knowledge of this coastline could be valuable. Why don't you sign on with me as fleet navigator?"

The lobster's long antennae lashed around his head like whips. "By Neptune, Cappy!" he exclaimed. "You mean you'd take on a loafing old lobster like meself?"

"I expect every hand to carry his own weight," said John Paul sternly.

"I'm a four-pound lobster, and I can carry every ounce,"

"You're closer to a two-pounder," said the captain. "And while you sail with me, I will hear no more of your tall tales."

"Agreed, Cappy," said the lobster. "When do we sail?"

With the turning tide, the jellyfish fleet sailed out of Boston Harbor. The blue lobster kept pace with them along the sea bottom.

Wanting no slackers in his navy, the captain kept a sharp eye on his new crewmember. That evening, however, he sniggered overhearing the lobster spin yarns to the younger jellies in the fleet.

"Why, me handsones," the lobster said, waving his clawless stump before their wide eyes. "I've been sailing these waters for over fifty years, don't you know. Lost me claw to a giant squid near this very spot. Five times, don't you know, I've been caught in the lobsterman's trap. Why, once, me handsones, the lobsterman even took me home and dropped me into a kettle of boiling water. Don't you know, I was nearly cooked alive before I found me chance to escape and run ten miles back to the sea."

