

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



23.

What Happened Next

The sea was still and silent. This month's full moon stared down upon the smooth water. Sometime during the night, Captain John Paul Jellyfish awoke. The cold water and fresh air told him he was alive. A dull pang in his side reminded him of the terrible battle he had been in, no telling how long ago.

John Paul spoke to the bright circle overhead. "So you are watching me again, bald man. And this time, what do you see? A defeated sea captain. A jellyfish fleet that is surely destroyed. Is this what you have been waiting month after month to see, bald man?"

The captain lay without moving until morning. Expecting to find Portuguese men-of-war patrolling the area, he remained low in the water. Instead, he spotted thirty, maybe forty black birds, double-crested cormorants, cruising around him, some with fish in their mouths.

John Paul's first effort to close his jelly bell caused great pain, and he moaned. The sound triggered a nearby cormorant. The bird began flapping his wings and shouting, "Good golly! A-O-K! He's A-O-K, by golly!"

"Could that be Sos?" John Paul wondered, watching the cormorant race toward him.

"A-O-K! A-O-K! Golly gee, he's A-O-K!" the bird ranted.

"That's Sos, all right," said the captain. "Him and his infernal spelling."

In the bird's wake sailed a parade of jellyfish, the first mate and lieutenant in the lead.

"He's alive! Alive-alive-o!" cried the moon jelly.

"Old Ironsides can't be sunk!" said the yellow sea nettle. "Three cheers for Old Ironsides! Hip! Hip!..."

"Stow it, Lieutenant!" the captain barked. "Why isn't the crew tending to their duties? Mr. Brown! These jellies look slovenly, *very slovenly*. Sos, what are all these birds hanging around here for?"

"Sir, we thought you had left us, sir," said the yellow sea yellow.

"The cormorant saved the day-o, Cap'n," said the moon jelly. "When they came dive-bombin' out of the sky-o, you should have seen those men-o'-war skedaddle. People won't be seein' blue floats around these parts for a long time-o."

John Paul remembered the black streaks falling from the sky. "Jolly good show, Sos," he said. "How did you ever find us this far out at sea?"

"Golly gee. While a woman was scrubbing the goo off my feather, good jolly, an albatross in the next tub told me those blue balloons chased you eastward. Well, golly, as soon as I was A-O-K, I fetched my friends and flew out here as fast as I could, by golly."

As the bird spoke, the other cormorants started flapping their wings.

"Golly gee! Golly gee!" Sos cried. "Our migration has finally begun, by golly. We're off to Florida at last!"

The cormorant swam off to join his mates who were facing upwind. Flapping, flapping, flapping, the flock made great splashes in the water with their wings. At first, they moved slowly like airplanes with too much cargo, but once airborne, they became sleek, black jets, joining high overhead in a big V.

"V for victory, by golly!" cried Sos, as the cormorants streamed southward.

When the V was no more than a period on the horizon, the blue lobster sprang up from the depths. "Well, Cappy," he said. "It's best I be going as well, don't you know."

"Where to, Navigator?" asked the captain. "Back to the life of a city scavenger?"

"No, sirree, Cappy. The way I figure it, there's a freckle-faced boy on a beach back there who can use a friend, not to mention a bit of protection, don't you know."

There followed many words of farewell, much backslapping, and tentacle shakes with the entire crew. By now, the lobster's second claw had grown back completely. Finally, with a flip of his fan tail, the lobster shot backward toward land.

"Mr. Brown!" cried the captain, after the lobster had gone. "Our mission on this coast is complete. Tell all hands to set sail at once, if you please! Lieutenant! You may set a course for England!"

