

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



24.

Home Call

The voyage home was one long roller coaster ride. The jellyfish fleet encountered blizzards, and icebergs, and sub-zero temperatures. Waves as tall as flagpoles kept their jelly sacs constantly wobbling. Even by following the powerful Gulf Stream Current, the passage took forty days and forty nights.

Between bouts of seasickness, Captain John Paul Jellyfish spent the days reflecting upon the past few months. As often happens to adventurers, he forgot the hard times and dwelled on the pleasant ones. Although he was eager to see homeport again, he felt the tinge of sadness that greets a traveler toward a trip's end.

One bright January morning, the lookout gave his final cry, "Land ho-o-o-o-o-o!" The crew rushed forward to see the white chalky strip that marked the horizon.

"Our finish line, lads!" John Paul announced. "The white cliffs of England!"

That afternoon, without fanfare, the gallant jellyfish sailed into Plymouth Harbor. Once in familiar waters, the jellies fanned out toward the island, or inlet, or seaweed patch they called home. Before parting, each crewmember received a good word from the captain.

After the regular crew had gone, the first mate sailed up to John Paul. "It's time to take my leave-o, Cap'n," he said. "I'm off to find my wife and our three-hundred and fifty-two little-uns."

"Very well, Mr. Brown," said John Paul. "May your sac always stay firm and your jelly steady."

"Right-o, Cap'n," said the moon jelly, sailing toward shore. "Perhaps we'll sail together again someday."

Next, the lieutenant, who had been lingering by the captain's side, cleared his throat and said, "Well, sir, it has been a successful voyage, has it not, sir? And well, sir, as you know, it is customary after a journey such as ours, sir, to reward a faithful

first officer with a small token of the captain's appreciation...a promotion, for instance, sir."

"Stow it, Lieutenant," grumbled the captain, and the yellow sea nettle turned a sharp about-face and sped off toward a nearby island.

At last, John Paul was alone. His home lay a hundred yards due east under an old dock. It was a short wooden structure upon which crowds of people gathered daily. Once, John Paul asked a pigeon what brought the people to this place. The bird, in turn, dropped a piece of popcorn in his mouth to read aloud some words off a brass plaque mounted on the end of the pier:

**FROM THIS DOCK IN THE YEAR 1620 THE PILGRIM FATHERS SAILED IN THE
MAYFLOWER TO SETTLE IN THE NEW WORLD**

John Paul fancied the idea of living under a dock from which people had once set off on a daring voyage, so he had brought Emma there to live with him. Now, as he sailed underneath the wooden planks and rounded the third piling on the right, he knew she would be there waiting for him.

There she was. But to tell the truth, things worked out differently from the way John Paul had expected. Here is the conversation that took place between Emma and the captain upon his return. It went like this:

JOHN PAUL: *Honey, I'm home! (He gives her a small hug in his tentacles.)*

EMMA: *Well, Johnny, it's about time. Where have you been all these months? Why have you kept me waiting under this smelly, cramped pier?*

JOHN PAUL: *I've been away on a great adventure, Emma, making great discoveries. I found a new land called America and fought a great battle.*

EMMA: *Oh, Johnny, don't bother me with your wild travel stories. Now that you're home, you can think about me. When can we start raising lots of little jellies?*

JOHN PAUL: *(gliding backward a short distance) Little jellies?*

EMMA: *And we can find a big cove to live in and never leave.*

JOHN PAUL: *Never?*

EMMA: *Just think of it, Johnny, a safe, easy life away from all danger, just you and me and maybe five hundred little ones.*

JOHN PAUL: *(sucking in a sacful of water) But, Emma, it's a big, beautiful world out there. There's so much of it I haven't explored yet.*

EMMA: *Now, listen, Johnny, you're going to have to make a choice. You either have your world or have me.*

(John Paul turns and exits)

In the gray mist of the following morning, a red-freckled jellyfish with two missing tentacles was seen sailing into every back cove of Plymouth Harbor.

“Hear ye! Hear ye! All jellyfish bold enough to sail with me!” the jellyfish cried. “I’m Captain John Paul Jellyfish, and I’m about to set sail for high adventure on the *Seven Seas*! I’ve just returned from sailing the North Atlantic! And I have six seas to go!”



