

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



4.

Along the Coast

Only the boldest of sea captains would have remained in those threatening waters. But that is what Captain John Paul Jellyfish intended to do. Hugging the shoreline, he caught a fresh land breeze and struck out northward with his fleet.

After a short distance, the beach ended. The flat sand gave way to round sand dunes that turned into grassy bluffs that became high rock cliffs rising straight from the sea. Monstrous breakers burst into white foam upon smacking the tall dark walls.

"Pardon, Cap'n," hailed the moon jelly. "Our scout discovered a sea cave-o in these cliffs."

"Excellent, Mr. Brown," John Paul replied. "I shall go below. Perhaps that's where I can acquire some information."

The captain submerged and found the sea cave. With a tricky bit of seamanship, he sailed into the long, winding tunnel. Mosaic patterns of blue barnacles, yellow sea anemone, and orange starfish decorated the walls.

"Good day, lads," John Paul greeted the colorful creatures. "Begging your pardon, but my fleet is new to these parts. Would any of you be so kind as to answer a few questions concerning our whereabouts?"

The cave dwellers ignored the visitor. The barnacles didn't budge; the anemone still twiddled their thousands of fingers, and the starfish refused to wave even a single arm.

The captain came about sharply. "Well, this certainly is a stuck-up crowd," he huffed and shot from the cave.

A mile farther on, the jellyfish fleet entered a forest of sea kelp. For over an hour, the jellies threaded through a jungle of swaying green. More than once, they halted for a crewmember to untangle a tentacle from around a kelp stalk.

Halfway through the kelp bed, John Paul came nose to nose with a bigmouth

bass.

"This could spell trouble, sir," the yellow sea nettle whispered. "We'd best retreat."

"Notice if you please, Lieutenant," John Paul replied coolly. "We jellyfish are too big for this fish to slurp up for his dinner. Likewise, this fish is too big for us to snare in our tentacles for *our* dinner. I say it is a standoff."

Then, with a polite exchange of nods, the fleet and fish continued their separate ways.

Back on the surface, the captain spotted a worn-out sun slipping behind the rock cliffs.

"Mr. Brown," he shouted. "Find somewhere to anchor for the evening, if you will. Our search must continue in the morning."

"Right-o, Cap'n," said the moon jelly, who started barking orders.

The fleet had hardly begun to beat out to sea before--*Splat! Spunk!*--the water exploded. A glance toward shore showed John Paul two boys dancing wildly upon the cliff tops. Each held a rock.

"Hit the jellyfish!" one of them shouted. "Two points for hitting the jellyfish!"

"Ready! Fire!" shouted the other, and their bombs came hurling seaward.

"Bags!" the captain cursed. "Artillery! All hands! Battle quarters!"

Sploonk! Sploosh! The rocks pounded the ocean. The tremendous splash nearly blasted the captain out of the water.

"Avast there, lads!" he bellowed, although he knew that boys could not understand a jellyfish. "We're friends, not foes!"

Plonk! Plunk! Another volley split the waves. It missed its mark by inches.

Although the thought of retreat was detestable to John Paul Jellyfish, this time, caught under fire by surprise, what other choice did he have? A direct hit from that two-pound shot would send any of his crew straight to the bottom.

"Bags!" the captain repeated, as another salvo whizzed over his jelly sac. "*I shall return!*"

That said, he turned and led his fleet toward the open ocean. By the time the next round of rocks struck the water, the jellies were safely out of range.

"Lieutenant!" John Paul rasped. "Battle report!"

The yellow sea nettle glided to the captain's side. "Sir!" he said. "No casualties, sir. But we thought those hooligans had sent you, sir, to the Jelly's Graveyard, sir."

"Those young sparks were just bored," the captain sneered. "Since they're unable

to swim and play in the water, what else can they do at the seaside but pitch rocks?"

"Har! Har! Boys overboard," went the moon jelly.

"Mr. Brown, set a course for the nearest safe anchorage," said John Paul. "Tell all hands to

keep a sharp lookout for danger."

"Right-o, Cap'n!"

By the time the stars returned that night, the jellyfish fleet had anchored in the calm waters behind a sand bar. They enjoyed their first motionless rest in one hundred days at sea.

On this sweet, starry night, the captain moored himself apart from the rest of the fleet. He allowed his thoughts to flow back to England, to Plymouth Harbor, and to his home underneath a certain pier there. That is where, he was certain, his true love was waiting for his return. Yes, tonight our hero was thinking about Emma, pink, soft, squishy Emma.

"There's plenty of jellyfish in the sea," John Paul sighed before drifting off to sleep. "But sweet Emma is the one for me."

