

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialize



7.

The Seagull

The seagull swooped down and landed ten feet from John Paul Jellyfish.

"This is *not* my day," the captain said.

The bird was fat. His plump body teetered on top of two pencil-thin legs. Black eyes like periods held fast on the stranded speckled sac before him.

John Paul knew about seagulls. He loathed them more than any other creature, land, sea, or air. Not only did they rarely have anything of interest to say, but also they were lazy scavengers who lived off handouts, spills, and dead stuff on beaches. He had never known one who did an honest day's work.

The seagull's sharp, bloody bill opened to let out another raucous, "*Quark! Quark!*"

"Good day," said the captain, trying to check the tremble in his voice and the shake in his jelly.

"Well, hello there, chump," said the bird. "Rather a good day indeed. Nothing like a big storm to bring in a first-rate feast onto a beach, I'll say. Why, old bean, let me tell you about the exquisite banquet I've been having this morning. Deeeeelicious!"

Triangle footprints followed the seagull as he stepped toward John Paul.

"For appetizers, chump, I had salted herring. All the rotten little fishies I could eat, crispy on the outside, nice and wormy on the inside. Simply delightful, chump! Deeeeelightful!"

The bird waddled closer to the captain.

"Next came a fine salad of kelp. Yes, yes, I know kelp is a rather common green, old bean, but mixed with a few moldy mussels, dead sea snails, and some putrid shrimp, it was delectable. Deeeelectable!"

Hop! Hop! Hop!

“After that came the main course, chump. Would you believe I dug my bill into the finest cod I ever tasted? My, oh, my, rancid to perfection. Slightly fetid on the bottom, filled with squirming maggots, covered with flies, and not too picked over by the other birds. Why, some of the guts were even left for me, old bean! I savored its stink for several seconds before gorging myself. I’m telling you, chump, it was divine. Simply deeeevine!”

A short flap of its wings brought the foul gull within inches of the captain’s jelly sac. Lowering his bloody bill, the bird said, “And so, old bean. And so, my tender *jellybean*, I’ve come to dessert. Eh? Now, let me see, I fancy something light, but not too filling. Something to top off a perfect meal, the *pièce de résistance*. Eh? I think I’ll try some scrumptious, succulent, deeeeelicious *jelly*! Catch my drift?”

As the seagull’s bill descended, John Paul made a fortunate glance between the bird’s legs. A boy, swinging a red pail, was wandering down the beach. His head was bowed, apparently searching for morning treasures.

“We have a guest, pal,” the captain said briskly.

The seagull looked up. “Well now, chump. So I see, so I see. Dessert must wait then. Eh? Beachcombers *are* a nuisance, I’ll say. Best not dally. Catch you later.”

The bird spread his wings and glided a short distance down the beach.

Meanwhile, the boy drew nearer. Often he stooped to collect a shell, an agate, or a polished piece of glass. With all the interesting stuff that had washed up on the beach, John Paul expected the boy to pass by a sandy, half-dead jellyfish. But no, the boy did stop. The tip of his rubber sandal jabbed into the captain’s spongy side.

“Good-bye, wonderful world,” said the captain, who knew how boys on beaches liked to step on squishy things. “Farewell, beautiful sea. Adieu, darling Emma,”

Then, staring at the big foot pressing into his side, he uttered what perhaps would be his last words on earth, “*Don’t tread on me.*”

