

# Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



8.

## King Charlie Vee

Captain John Paul Jellyfish waited for the foot to put an end to him.

The boy wiggled his toes.

“Here it comes,” said the captain. “I’ll soon be nothing more than a messy smear of jelly on a foreign shore, a dead sea captain without a burial at sea.”

The foot, a bare shin, and the dangling red bucket, was all John Paul could see of the boy. Not until the boy stooped could the captain see a face as well. Freckles covered it from the end of his chin to the brink of his bright red hair. The eyes were wide and blue.

Reaching out a wet finger, the boy brushed some grit off John Paul’s jelly sac.

“Behold! This jellyfish has freckles like me!” he declared.

Now John Paul heard something curious. The boy spoke again, but this time in a high, squeaky voice.

“Marvelous, Your Majesty. You both have many handsome freckles.”

The boy dug his knees into the sand. He poked John Paul with a finger.

“Not much to a jellyfish, is there?” the low voice said. “All skin, no bones.”

The captain huffed indignantly.

The high voice replied, “Jellyfish are invertebrates, Your Highness. They’re little more than two pieces of skin with jelly in between.”

“Interesting,” John Paul said. “The boy talks with himself. I often hold similar private conversations. Perhaps this boy isn’t the type who steps on things after all.”

As if he understood these words, the boy leaped to his feet.

“Behold! I, King Charlie Vee, shall set this jellyfish free,” he said, and, swinging his bucket, he peeled off toward the ocean.

Sparkling water sloshed over the pail’s brim when the boy returned. With two fingers, he dribbled some drops over the parched jellyfish.

Ahhh! The captain wobbled in ecstasy.

“Behold!” announced the low voice. “This jellyfish is alive!”

To which the high voice replied, “Excellent, Your Excellency!”

Using his sandal, the boy scooped up the limp jellyfish and dropped him into the pail.

Ahhh! Bliss! Relief! Rapture! The instant John Paul’s jelly bell settled on the water, it filled out handsomely. His tentacles unraveled to the bottom of the bucket. Oh, how marvelous it was to be floating again, no matter how small and red the world appeared.

In the round circle of a sky, John Paul saw the boy’s grinning, freckled face. *Swish! Swash!* went the water and what followed was the rockiest ride of the captain’s life. Finally, the bucket tipped, and the seasick sea nettle splashed back into the ocean.

“My, how good it is to feel the sway of the sea beneath my hull again,” John Paul said when his head stopped spinning. “First, I must test my equipment.”

A few trial contractions of his jelly bell and swishes of his tentacles satisfied the captain.

“One main tentacle is torn slightly, but otherwise I’m in good repair,” he said.

As for the boy, he was sitting on the sand, stripping off his clothes. Off came his T-shirt, shorts, and underwear, until, as naked as a seal pup, he sprang to his feet and dashed into the water.

“Ah, a skinny-dipper,” John Paul noted, watching the boy dog paddle toward him.

When the boy reached the captain, he floated on his belly. “Behold, jellyfish,” he said. “I, King Charlie Vee, shall show you the *jellyfish float*.” With that, he wrapped his arms around his knees and bobbed in a balled-up position for several seconds.

“Well done, sir,” the captain said. “What will people dream up next?”

John Paul was not above showing off some of his aquatic maneuvers himself. First, he performed a fine three-hundred and sixty-degree spin, before fluttering gracefully downward like a silk handkerchief. Underwater, he executed two loop-the-loops and finished off with a rocket shot to the surface. For a jellyfish that had just spent several hours stranded on a hot beach, this was a first-rate performance, and the boy showed his appreciation with a wide grin.

That night, long after King Charlie Vee had left, John Paul Jellyfish floated offshore in a reflective mood. Although eager to rejoin his fleet, he doubted his strength to face the open sea.

A full moon laid a wobbly moonbeam path across the ocean and spread silver

dust over the beach.

While studying the white circle in the sky, the captain thought. *There's that bald man peeping through his hole as he does every month. Why does he spy on me? He's a friendly-looking chap, though. I wonder if he had anything to do with saving my life today. So many mysteries in this world. Who could that man be?*

