

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



5.

The Storm

The next morning, Captain John Paul Jellyfish awoke with a slap of cold water across his jelly sac. The sky was red and streaked with feathery white clouds.

John Paul searched his memory. "Red skies in the morning," he pondered. "That certainly means something to a sailor. Now if I could only remember what it was."

The first mate cruised over to the captain's side. "Mornin', Cap'n," he piped out merrily. "*Red skies in the mornin', sailors take warnin'*, so the little ditty goes. Looks like we're in for some dirty weather-o, a hearty blow, don't you know, Cap'n."

"Quite right, Mr. Brown," John Paul replied. "Prepare the fleet to sail at once. If a storm is approaching, it would be best to ride it out in deeper water."

"Right-o, Cap'n," said the moon jelly crisply, and in no time, the jellied mariners had put out to sea once more.

All morning, a stiff northeasterly blew. Dark, smoky clouds mounted overhead. In the distance, thunder rumbled.

When the captain was sure his fleet was far enough offshore to weather the storm, he ordered, "Heave to!"

Almost at the same moment, the wind mysteriously died. The air chilled, and the water became mirror flat.

"It's the calm before the storm-o, Cap'n," said the first mate.

"Sir! This tempest will be a whopper, sir," added the lieutenant.

"Order the crew to take in all slack, if you please, Mr. Brown," John Paul ordered. "Lieutenant, have every jelly batten down his hatch."

"Aye, aye, Captain!" the two officers chorused.

Within minutes, a lightning bolt cracked the sky. The roar of its thunder followed. *Flash! Boom! Flash! Boom!* The sea heaved and a terrific wind tore through the fleet.

"All hands! All hands below," the captain commanded. "Dive! Dive!"

Buffeted by gale-force winds, pelted by heavy raindrops, John Paul Jellyfish stood watch as his crew disappeared beneath the tossing sea. The captain would be the last one below. Frothy whitecaps raced past him like stallions. Zigzags of lightning made a jigsaw puzzle from the sky. More thunderclaps shook the air.

Flash! Boom! Flash! Flash! Boom! Boom!

Once the regular sailors had submerged, down went the first mate. Down went the lieutenant. Finally knowing his crew was now safe, John Paul could go below himself. Instead, something dreadful happened. A tremendous swell rolled under the captain and sent him skyward. At its foamy crest, the wave curled and batted the jellyfish toward shore like a badminton shuttlecock.

"Bags!" the captain cried. He skipped across the wave, tumbling tentacles over sac. His tentacles tangled in knots. For an instant, he glimpsed where he was headed, straight toward the rock cliffs he'd visited the day before.

Pitting all his strength against the great force of nature, John Paul attempted to swim seaward.

But with tentacles fouled and the wind blasting his bow, he gained no headway. The waves clawed him closer and closer to the waiting rocks.

"Bags! Oh, bags!" John Paul thundered. "Am I to be dashed upon those walls like a wet rag?"

Now, with the dark crags towering overhead, a huge white swell broke over the captain. Tons of seawater plunged down upon him, pushing him deep underwater. Everything was whirlpools and bubbles.

John Paul, his jelly sac about to explode from the pressure of the ocean depths, made one last surge toward the surface.

"Emma! Emma!" he gasped.

That was the last thing he remembered.

