

The Ghost Crab and the Sky Jelly



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Before the sun comes to Juno Beach, the beach belongs to the Ghost Crab.

He is the color of the sand on purpose. He has eight legs for running sideways, two claws, and two eyes on stalks that turn every which way, so that nothing on the beach happens without his seeing it. He is very proud of those eyes. All night he runs the wrack line, and by morning he can tell you everything that washed up and what each thing is: a sea bean, a shark's tooth no bigger than a fingernail, a sand dollar, somebody's left flip-flop. The Ghost Crab knows the name of everything. That is his whole job, and he is good at it.

On this particular morning, in the thin dark before dawn, on the stretch of beach just south of the pier, a Moon Jelly had drifted in on the tide and lay rocking in the wash, pale and round as a dropped coin, with a four-leaf clover showing through her glass. To the north the pier jutted long and dark into the sea, its lights off, like a black comb somebody had laid on the water.

THE TIDE LETTER

A fable from the Golden Shore · Juno Beach, Florida · October 2026

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"Crab," said the Moon Jelly, "what does the morning look like?"

"Gray," said the Ghost Crab, without turning a stalk. "Same as yesterday."

A Moon Jelly has no eyes, only little light-spots around her rim. She can feel the light growing, the way you feel the sun on your arm with your eyes shut, but she cannot see a shape. So she had to ask. She was used to asking.

Down the beach a Fisherman stood knee-deep in the trough with a bucket of sand fleas and a long rod, casting into the dark with the pier off his left shoulder. Beside him on the dry sand stood a Girl and her Grandmother, visitors, wrapped in beach towels against the cool. The Girl came from a city where the sky was a strip between the buildings. She had never seen so much of it at once.

"What time is it?" the Girl asked.

"Six thirty-two," said the Fisherman, who had not looked at a watch. "Watch past the end of the pier. In a minute there'll be a rocket."

"How do you know?"

"Been standing here thirty years," he said, and cast again.

At six thirty-three, a star climbed out of the sea.

It came up orange beyond the end of the pier, beyond the lighthouse, beyond everything, too far away to hear, and it climbed and climbed and bent slowly away to the northeast, out over the water. The Girl's mouth fell open. The Grandmother's hand found the Girl's shoulder. The Fisherman reeled in.

And then it happened. High up, higher than any bird or cloud, the rocket's breath climbed into sunlight. The sun was not up yet on Juno Beach. Not for most of an hour. But up there, where the rocket was, the morning had already arrived, and it reached down and lit the rocket's long trail of frozen breath until it glowed. The trail swelled. It bloomed. It grew a shining bell as wide as the sky and let down long, pale tentacles behind it, blue and silver and white, with a smudge of orange underneath like the last of a sunset. It swam, enormous and silent, across the dark.

"A JELLY!" cried the Ghost Crab, every leg off the sand at once. "A jelly swimming the sky! Your cousin, Moon Jelly. Your cousin is in the sky!"

"Tell me," said the Moon Jelly.

So the Crab told her. He told her about the bell and the light inside it. He told her about the tentacles trailing back toward the sea. He told her the colors, one by one. Now, a Ghost Crab can see all the way around himself, but he cannot see straight up. There is a hole in the top of his looking, and he never thinks about it. But the sky jelly was not straight up. It was low over the ocean, out past the pier, in the one strip of sky a Ghost Crab can see, and he saw every bit of it. And the Moon Jelly, who had never seen anything in her life, rocked in the wash and saw it too.

"What IS it?" the Girl asked the Fisherman.

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"Rocket exhaust," he said. "Mostly water. It freezes up there, and the air's so thin it spreads out wide, and the sun's already up where the rocket is, so it lights up like a lantern. It isn't falling, either. It only looks like it's falling. It's following the curve of the world."

The Girl thought about this. "So it's a jellyfish made of morning," she said. "Before the morning gets here."

The Fisherman opened his mouth to say no, it's exhaust. He had seen a hundred of these. He knew the times and the names and the pads they came from, and he had not tipped his head back for a single one in years.

He tipped his head back now. The rod hung in his hand, and the sand fleas went about their business in the bucket, and for the first time in a long time, the Fisherman looked.

By the time the real sun came up over the water, the sky jelly had thinned to a smudge and drifted off to the east. The Moon Jelly went out on the tide. The Ghost Crab went down his hole for the day, and if you had asked him what he saw that morning, he would have told you the name of everything. And then, for once, he would have stopped naming, and just told you about the jelly.



Moral: Learn the name of a wonder. Then look up anyway.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John M. Henry".

John M. Henry · Juno Beach, Florida

Thank you for coming down to meet the tide.

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