

# JELLYBEANS

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John Boston

Paulie was supposed to meet Bobby Dornan, whom everybody just called "Dorkman". Bobby was a good kid and a great friend, but he was also a dork, hence the nickname. He and Paul spent most of their time together enjoying the great outdoors. They were lucky enough to be able to do that in their town. They were always out exploring the coast of Oregon or hiking up in the mountains. Since they were so close to the coast, they got the moderating effects of the ocean. It was cool and wet in the winter and warm and dry in the summer. Usually, around Halloween is when the winter rainy season began and it lasted until the end of April. This year, the rainy season had gotten off to an early start. It was only the middle of October and the rains had begun.

They usually started their day with a trip to the pharmacy that was owned by Bobby's uncle. They would stock up on soda and candy, then head out for the day. Last week, he and Bobby had spent most of their time fishing on the pier. Bobby had caught a fish and a big one by their standards. They had a hard time reeling it in since they were so high off the water. The pier went out for several hundred feet into the ocean. Great place to hang out when you're a kid. Bobby's uncle gave them free bait. They would just sit on the bench out in the pier and fish. They didn't need licenses because of their age. They were both twelve, but they just told the Fish and Game Officer, they were eleven. He and Bobby had made plans to do some pier fishing today and Paul couldn't wait. It had started drizzling the night before and by morning, it was coming down pretty good. Paul watched the weather and the weatherman said they would have a break later on this morning and afternoon before a second and more powerful storm hit the coast. Paul knew they had a tight window to pull this off. He called Bobby, who broke the bad news.

"My dad wants to have family time today," he said, sounding pretty dour.

"Seriously? We have fish to catch."

"I know, but he won't listen. He wants us to do something together, as a family."

"You don't even like your family," said Paul.

"I know, but what am I going to do. He's my dad after all."

Paul knew where this was going. He has to spend the day alone on the pier fishing by himself. A whole *shit ton of fun*.

Still, he had no reason to let this little setback stop him from catching his fish. They were practically asking to be caught.

"Are the poles and tackle in the same place?" he asked

"Yup, right where we left them. Get some bait from my uncle."

"No thanks, I use my own bait. Those things gross me out and they bite."

"No, they don't."

"Oh, yes they do. They're biters."

"Whatever, just make sure no one sees you take them out or put them back in. I don't want our stuff stolen."

"Will do, captain. Have fun with family time."

"I'm sure I won't," said Bobby and hung up.

Paul noticed about nine-thirty that morning that the rain had begun to slow. He put on all of his rain gear and took his bike out. He told his parents he'd be going down to the pier and that's when his father gave him *his dad look*.

"You know I don't like you going down there. It's the middle of nowhere. Plus, it's got a lot of California garbage down there."

That's what his father called the homeless people who sometimes camped out on the pier. They slept on the benches that lined the pier. His dad called every undesirable they ran into "Cali Garbage."

"Dad, I'll be fine. I've got my phone and if they give me any crap, I've got my knife," said Paul and he pulled out his switchblade.

"Just make sure you stab them at least once with it before you're murdered, okay?" his father said as he left.

He knew his dad didn't want him to go, but he also didn't want him hanging out inside the house and playing video games all day. His father finally let him have a video game system and it was over twenty years old. The same one his father played when he was his age. He was lucky to have even that. Nothing quite like playing the coolest games from twenty years ago.

Paul stopped at the pharmacy. He waved to Mike, the owner and Bobby's uncle.

"Hi, Paulie. Whatcha doing?"

"Going down to the pier. Do a little fishing."

"Be careful down there....a lot of shit bags down there. I sure wish the cops would kick them out of this town for good."

"I'll be fine."

"Hey, I got some overstock here, jellybeans. I ordered a case and got three, but only paid for one. Do you want some? They're on the house."

Paul was stunned. Mike never gave them anything for free. That bastard would charge them for a cup of water if he could. Paul was suspicious, but free jelly beans were too good to pass up.

"Well.....since they're on the house."

"Yeah, I tried some. Pretty damn good," he said and gave Paul two huge bags. He tucked it away in his knapsack. He waved goodbye and was on his way.

He filled up his canteen at a water fountain near the entrance to the park. That's also where they hid their poles and tackle box. Conant State Park was one of the dozens of state parks that lined Oregon's coast. In the summer months, they were packed, but during the rainy season, they were pretty much deserted. He took the good pole and some plastic worms and headed down to the pier on his bike.

The park was small by comparison, but still big enough to get lost in, or disappear in. Ten thousand acres, most of it beachfront, except for the pier. He had to go about a mile or so on the paved road, then took a dirt path to the pier.

He was delighted to see it was almost empty.....*almost that is*. There were some homeless people camped out at the very end. He and Bobby had spent enough time down there to know that most will leave you alone if you leave them alone. California's homeless situation was so bad, it was beginning to spill over into Oregon. One time over the summer, they had run into a homeless person who was just plain nuts. Wouldn't leave them alone and just kept asking them if they had any money. Finally, Bobby had enough. He took out his knife and Paul took out his.

*"I'm not going to tell you again old man.....fuck off!"* said Bobby with the knife in his hand.

He wasn't sure if it was the sight of their knives or the fact that the kid's demeanor had changed so abruptly. Whatever the reason, he just turned around and left them alone. That was the first time he ever saw Bobby get mad.....*hopefully it would be the last*.

Other than that, they had no problems whatsoever. They were just out there to catch some fish, that's it. Paul figured he was due. It had been over two weeks since he had caught anything, even seaweed.

He cast his line in the water. The rain had slowed to a fine drizzle. He was still bone dry. His parents bought him some very expensive, water-tight boots that were worth every penny. His feet were still bone dry. He had his rain suit on. It was wet but still fairly warm, in the mid-'60s. He figured he'd be at it for a few hours, then go home. He kept his knife very accessible.....just in case.

The rain had slowed to the point where he could clearly see the water from where he was sitting. He took out his big bag of jelly beans and started eating. Mike wasn't kidding, these things were amazing. Flavors he had never dreamed of, like *banana berry and cherry mango*.

While he was shoving jelly beans into his mouth and taking sips of water from his canteen, he couldn't help but notice something in the water. He wasn't sure what it was. It looked like a huge bedsheet, but it was almost transparent. It seemed to go for hundreds of feet in the water. He leaned over to look at it. It just seemed to be floating in the water. It got a hold of his lure and bobber and began pulling. It was a gentle pull at first, then it became almost possessed and really started pulling. He grabbed it and kept it from going overboard into the water. Whatever this thing was, it was not going to let go. He tried and tried, but it was no use. It was going to take the pole over and perhaps him as well. He grabbed his knife and managed to cut the line, right before they were about to go over.

Bobby was scared now. Whatever the hell was in the water had done this. Bobby made certain the line was strong enough. He had lost a huge fish because they used a cheap line. He made sure that would not happen again. He was shaking now, both from exhaustion and mostly from just plain fear.

He looked over and could see the thing in the water seemed to have gotten bigger. He took out his phone and began recording as much as he could, but the rain and drizzle made it difficult. Paul had seen a lot of fish, a lot of very unusual fish as well since his dad liked to spend his weekends in his fishing boat. He had never seen anything like this. Whatever this thing was, it wasn't on anyone's radar. *It looked like a monster. Something you find in the deepest and darkest corners of the ocean.*

Paul followed it down the pier. It seemed to go on forever. It had real definition or boundaries, it just seemed to take up the whole ocean. It was getting closer and closer to the pier. Whatever this thing was, it was also incredibly strong.

Paul figured it must be some kind of jellyfish. They weren't too common in the cold water in Oregon, but occasionally, they did pop up. Far more people are hospitalized or killed by jellyfish stings every year than by sharks, yet no one makes horror movies about jellyfish. The slightest touch of their tentacles on open skin can be deadly. This was unlike any jellyfish anyone had ever recorded. *This thing was absolutely enormous.*

He wasn't sure if it was one jellyfish, or a bunch of them all floating close together. It must be bunches of them because jellyfish don't get this big.

He just didn't see any breaks or open water. The massive sheet-like creature just seemed to be getting bigger and bigger with each passing minute. It was now the size of a football field and growing by the minute.

Paul knew not to disturb the homeless people, but this was different. This was a goddamn emergency. He had to make sure someone else saw this thing as well. Maybe one of them had a better phone to take pictures of photos. He ran over to a man sitting on the bench with his dog, who looked miserable. The man just seemed to be staring out into the ocean with this blank look on his face. Paul had no time to waste.

"Um excuse me, sir. I think there's something in the water. Something you should see." he said nervously.

The man said nothing and just turned to face him. There was an awkward silence among them for a minute.

"You don't say. There's always something in the water, now isn't there?" he said rather sarcastically.

"Yes, I suppose there is, but not like this. I really think you should see it."

"Do you now?" said the old man as he looked away.

"Yeah, I do. I've never seen anything like it."

"I've been coming to this pier since the summer of 1947. I was your age then. I've seen a lot of things in this water. Even saw a dead body in here in the summer of 62. Price was the young girl's name. Evelyn Price. Pretty name for a pretty girl. Never did find out what happened. Don't know if she fell in or someone pushed her in. Such a shame, she was such a pretty girl."

Paul didn't know what the hell the old guys' problem was, but he wasn't going to listen to his bullshit. He ran away and went down to the next man on the pier. He and his girlfriend were passed out. They both looked like bikers, wearing rain-soaked biker jackets. How anyone could sleep in the rain was beyond his understanding, but here they were, passed out in the rain, soaked to the bone. Even at his age, he knew this was caused by drugs or alcohol, or both.

"Um, excuse me, sir?" he said.

The two of them didn't even move. Paul wasn't sure if they were even alive. Not that it mattered, he would be back to check on them later.

He ran over to the next guy on the bench. He was clearly one of those *undesirables* his father had warned him about. He was homeless, trying to sleep while keeping the rain off of him. He looked over and could see some kind of jelly-like tentacle climbing its way up one of the sides of the pier. Whatever this thing was, it was not content to stay in the ocean. It was exploring. If a regular jellyfish tentacle could cause the kind of damage it did, he could only imagine what something this size could do. It was massive. It looked like a piece of rope made out of jelly. Pretty soon, there were dozens of them. He didn't know how far it could reach, but he didn't want to take the chance. He ran over to the guy and stood in front of him.

"Sir....sir, I need to speak to you," he said, trying to sound as grown-up as he could.

The man lifted the newspaper off of his head and looked right at Paul.

"I'm trying to sleep here kid, get lost," he said as he covered back up.

"There's something in the water. Something I think you should see."

"Really.....what would that be?"

"A jellyfish....a really, really big one."

"Jellyfish, huh? I've already seen one, now get out of here, let me sleep."

Paul knew time was running out. He looked over and was alarmed to see dozens of those weird, slimy tentacles all over the side of the pier. He would have to try again. This time he would just appeal to the man's wallet.

"You know.....if you could film something like this and put it on the internet, you could be famous and make lots and lots of money," said Paul.

The man sat up and rubbed his eyes. He looked annoyed at Paul but figured this might actually be worth his time. He looked over the edge. Even in a semi-drunken haze, he could clearly see the giant jellyfish-like thing in the water. He looked hard at what was in the water. He followed it around to the other side of the pier.

"The fuck is that thing?" the man said softly

"I think it's some kind of jellyfish."

'Jellyfish don't get this big."

"Well, this one does," said Paul.

The man ran back to the bench and grabbed his backpack. He said nothing to Paul as he scooted away, leaving Paul alone. Paul followed him.

"Wait, what about those other people? What are we going to do about them?"

"That's their problem kid," he said as he ran off the pier.

Paul stood on the edge of the pier, at the other end. He was safe now, but the others on the pier were in trouble. The tentacles were now on the floor of the pier itself. The dog was more alert and tried to warn its master of its impending danger. He was whimpering and barking at the whip-like tentacles that were slowly enveloping the pier. Paul couldn't believe this was happening. He wanted to record it, but he also, more importantly, wanted to warn those on the pier.

"HEY....WAKE UP, PEOPLE! GET OFF THE GODDAMN PIER!" he shouted at the top of his lungs.

"GET OFF THE FUCKING PIER!" he shouted again. The old man and the sleeping couple didn't even look up.

Paul was shaking now. How big was this thing? Where did it stop? He could see it seemed to fill up the water for hundreds of feet in every direction.

*What the hell is this thing?*

He didn't know what to do? Did he call 911? Call his dad? What the hell was he supposed to do? The tentacles had now crossed the sides of the pier, blocking his path to the rest of the people left

on it. He didn't dare step on it. He had already gotten a taste of what it could do. He ran over to the closest tentacle and watched it slowly moving its way across the wooden floor of the pier, like a blind person looking for something.

*Those damn things were learning. It was like a child learning to walk.*

He was now only a few feet away from one of them. He took out his bag of jellybeans and started pelting the tentacles with the candy. Much to his amazement, they seemed to almost instantly dissolve once they made contact with it.

*Jesus, just imagine what that thing would do to human skin?*

All of the tentacles had stopped moving and were now slowly making their way towards Paul and his jelly beans. He threw more and more at them. Pretty soon, hundreds of the jelly-like tentacles were following him down the edge of the pier. Whatever this thing was, it clearly liked jelly beans. He stepped off the pier and ran alongside the beach, throwing the jellybeans into the water. Much to his amazement, the tentacles rose up from the water and caught them in mid-air. He had another bag in his knapsack. He ripped open the top and started throwing handfuls into the water. It looked like a pack of piranhas devouring their prey. There was splashing everywhere. Paul was nearly frozen in shock. He could see the thing moving in the water.

It was massive.....absolutely massive.....and probably very dangerous. He kept throwing the jellybeans into the water, trying desperately to lead the creature away from the pier. So far, his plan was working. He was now almost half a mile away from the pier. He was also almost out of jelly beans. He found a rock on the beach and took a rubber band out from his sack and tied it to the bag. There were still a few beans left. He ran away from the shore, to the tree line and threw the rock and bag as hard as he could into the water. A few seconds later, something resembling a giant ball of jelly surfaced and tried desperately to find the bag. Paul could see dozens of the creature's tentacles scouring the beach, looking for more jellybeans. He prayed the thing would stay put. He ran back to the beach. On his way, he passed by the old man. He just grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled him up out of his seat. The old man was clearly not impressed.

"I beg your pardon young man," he said irritated.

"Evelyn Price would like to talk to you. You'd better come with me."

The old man was stunned.

"Where do you know that name from?"

"Follow me," he said and led the man over to the sleeping couple. He ran over to the biker couple that was passed out in the rain. He shook the man violently.

"Hey, wake up man. Somebody got robbed down here. Cops are on their way, you better split." said Paul.

The man opened his eyes and instead of exploding, he shook the girl, who was still in a drug-induced sleep. He picked her up and carried her off the pier. The four of them ran off the

pier as fast as they could. Paul never did look back to see if the jellyfish monster was back or not. He didn't want to look.

The biker couple left him at the tree line. He ran with the old man, up the dirt path, back to the paved road.

"Evelyn told me to tell you, not to go back to the pier, not now, not ever," he said.

The old man was clearly confused but nodded his head. Paul got on his bike and peddled away, as fast as he could. He never stopped peddling, until he got home. He stopped when he saw his father in the driveway. He threw down his bike and ran over to his father and threw his arms around him. He was still in shock.

"Whoa bud, what's wrong?"

Paul tried as best he could to describe what happened. His father was stunned. He sat down on the stone wall surrounding their house. He didn't know what to say.

"Well, I'm glad you're okay," he said, getting up.

'Oh, I don't want you going anywhere near that pier from now on. Am I clear?"

'Yes sir. That won't be a problem."

"Good, now wash your hands, your mom made us lunch. It's probably not very good, since she's not much of a cook, but do me a favor and pretend you like it."

Paul nodded. He didn't tell his mother what happened on the pier, not that she would have believed him anyway. He washed his hands and sat down to dinner. Dad was right, it wasn't much of a meal, but she tried and he knew better than not to eat it. He was glad he was safe in his house and away from that pier. He'd have a hell of a story to tell Bobby when he got back. In the middle of their meal, they clearly heard screaming followed by gunshots, then more screaming. They all got up from the table and went outside. He could see dozens of people running down the street as fast as they could. He saw his math teacher, Mr. Felson running without his pants on. He pushed over an older woman and kept on running.

"Dad, what's wrong with Mr. Felson?"

His father said nothing and just looked at the group of people running blindly, as fast as their bodies would allow. Some of them looked panic-stricken. They were running as fast as they could.....*as if their lives depended on it.*

"Jesus Christ, the hell is wrong with these people?" asked his father.

A minute later, they heard the roar of the tsunami alarm.

"Oh, my God.....is it a tsunami?"

"I don't know. We've had these alarms before. It was never like this."



His father grabbed one of their neighbors and asked him what the hell was going on. His name was Eddy something or other. He had lived down the street from them for years, since before Paul was born. He just looked at my father and said nothing as he broke free. The man looked out of his mind with fear.

"Honey, maybe we should leave too until we find out what's happening here." said his mother.

"Yeah.....maybe you're right."

The three of them decided to get out of the village as well. Their house was only about a mile or so from shore. Paul didn't have time to pack. He grabbed his knapsack and ran out to the car with his parents. No sooner did he look up, than he saw it. The massive wall of jelly was filling into the streets of their fishing village. The jellyfish was bigger than he ever imagined. Its whip-like tentacles went on for miles and miles.

"Oh, dear God, what is that thing?" asked his mother.

"Oh, shit, now I really messed up," said Paul softly.

"What are you talking about?" his father said softly

"I know what it's looking for," said Paul, not sure if he should scream, or just start running with the rest of the town.

The three of them tried to get into his father's truck, but the jelly creature was on them within seconds. It was as if they were all buried in an avalanche of jellyfish. A few seconds later, it broke through the window and spilled into the seat beside him.

Paul tried to scream, but the tentacles grabbed him and pulled him in. The pain was brutal, but over quickly. He was just floating in the jelly, which seemed to go on forever.....and ever.

*He wasn't alive for more than a minute once the creature ingested him. He could feel the skin and flesh being ripped away from his body. He looked up and saw Uncle Mike floating next to him. He tried to scream, but his mouth was filled with jelly. He saw lots of people and some animals in the massive creature. It certainly didn't mind devouring them, but it was looking for something very specific, it had found a new favorite food.*

It was looking for more jellybeans.