

## **Characters**

**Narrator (M/F)**

**Landlord (M/F)**

**Air Raid Warden (M/F)**

## Scene 1

### **Narrator:**

There are as many versions of this particular tale as there are old sailors relating it. In some of the yarns, the central figure is a shaggy pepper coloured mongrel, in others it is an auburn and white St. Bernard, in yet others a sandy curly coated Retriever. The name of the dog varies too from Matelot to Admiral and as for the pub, well they include The Anchor and The Crows Nest. But in this version, which of course is the authentic one, the dog is named Captain and the pub The Jolly Sailors. As you might have guessed The Jolly Sailors was in a busy seaport, much frequented by matelots who became increasingly jolly as the evenings wore on.

Because it was World War 2, blackout precautions were in full force. After nightfall, not a light was allowed to burn at an open window, not a street lamp flicker to light the way home, not a welcoming twinkle from the ships in the harbour. The town lay like an unlit coal cellar, unless there was a moon. The air raid wardens held no jurisdiction over the moon, which shone when it pleased.

For sailors seeking respite from a life of alternating boredom and fear on the high seas, the dark held disadvantages and advantages. Whereas it was advantageous for a kiss and a cuddle with a friendly lass, it wasn't so easy to find their way back on board, particularly when jolly. After closing time, the redcaps or military police scoured the streets for drunken matelots as a tramp might trawl the pavements for a sixpence. Being out after curfew and being under the weather at the same time were both chargeable offences. The very least a jolly sailor could expect was a haranguing from his commanding officer.

No-one could quite remember when the dog, a brindle coloured cross mastiff turned up to alleviate this problem. One story went that the dog once belonged to a drunken sailor who trained him to take him back to the docks at closing time. A variation was that the dog was the drunken sailor, drowned one dark night while inebriated, then reincarnated as a dog to guide other drunken sailors back to base.

Where the animal slept or ate no-one knew; it just appeared at closing time, took hold of a sailor who looked worse for wear, tugged him by the jumper or trousers back to port and away from trouble. It was a familiar sight or rather sound on the streets, a low rumbling from the dog, a stumbling cursing or laughing sailor. And when the dog had delivered one sailor, it would return for more. Mostly placid, the dog brooked no nonsense and anyone playing the fool would receive the full force of its glittering amber stare and deep throated growl. It was like a tough tug boat captain who it was better not to cross. Always its own master, it was named Captain by the men.

Because it would be advantageous for the enemy to know which crafts were in port; build up a pattern of their movements, the sailors wore plain hat bands; no HMS this or that for third columnists to report. Posters on buses and street walls warned, 'Be Like Dad, Keep Mum' and 'Loose Talk Costs Lives'. But in The Jolly Sailors, it was OK to relax a little; everyone was in uniform; they were all on the same side. Merchant seamen of different nationalities came in off the

cargo ships, but they were carefully vetted at the port. A few civilians drank there but they were known locals. For a spy to slip in unnoticed would be inconceivable; they would stand out like a rubber duck in a bathtub of boats.

And yet, the fact that something seems inconceivable can be its very strength. With Gerhardt Braun this was so. The German officer had been brought as near to shore as possible by submarine, then swum to land in his wetsuit. In his back pack was one British sailor suit, a small radio set and a knife. His destination, a place where he could pick up as much information in the least time; a pub where sailors congregated. 'The Jolly Sailors' had been selected as such a place.

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That afternoon Gerhardt walked around the perimeter of the port and noted the ships at anchor. From a ruined building, he telegraphed his information through to headquarters; it would prove useful for tonight's bombing raid.

At the Jolly Sailors, Gerhardt ordered a beer. His English was good. In the empty snug he sat by an open window adjacent to the bar. As gossip drifted in with the cigarette smoke, he made jottings on the back of his cigarette packet; Senior Service naturally. When others came into the snug, he lay his head on the table as if drunk, memorised useful segments of their conversations.

Towards closing time the brass bell sounded for last orders and soon afterwards the landlords voice rang out,

**Landlord:** Goodnight lads. I don't know when or where you're bound but God Bless you and Good Luck.

**Narrator:** As the pub emptied Gerhardt delayed. He would remain until the last possible moment. When the bombs began falling, he would escape in the confusion. Sprawled over the table, he reached out and located his backpack. As he did so, his hand touched something wet; recoiling he opened his eyes. Watching him was a large, ugly dog; in its bullet smooth head, two amber eyes burned. To Gerhardt's surprise the dog took his jerkin tightly between his teeth and tugging, pulled him towards the door.

The landlord bustled in, carrying a crate. Noticing Gerhardt's consternation, he said,

**Landlord:** Don't mind him mate, he'll see you to the dockyard safe and sound will our Captain. Just let yourself be led and he won't give you any grief.

**Narrator:** The dockyard, thought Gerhardt; the last place he wanted to go right now! When he struggled, the animal gave a low growl. Gerhardt

stopped when he saw two military policemen approaching, but the dog, as if reading his thoughts, pulled him down a side alley.

No moon that night, the dark was disabling. Gerhardt man had no idea where he was, but the creature had no trouble, cutting across yards, weaving down jitties. As the big dog tugged him this way and that, a plan formed in the German's mind.

When Gerhardt smelt the fishy scent from the docks, felt the cool breeze off the sea, he knew it was time to act. He managed to locate the torch in his backpack and his fingers found his flick knife. He turned on the torch. He was sorry for what he must do, because he felt a niggling respect for the animal; so intent upon a mission of its own. Reflected in the light of his torch, the dog appeared noble, intelligent, kind, and he hesitated. Lingering still, there came the sudden droning of planes; the air raid warning siren; an order bawled by an Air Raid Warden –

**Air Raid Warden:** Put that bloody light out!

**Narrator:** But it was too late. The pilot aimed for the only light he could see twinkling near the dockyard below. Where man and dog had stood, was reduced to a crater.

In a secluded cove a submarine emblazoned with a swastika emerged, waited for a short while, dived and disappeared again into the deep.

The story came out eventually, and Gerhardt was given a decent funeral. It could not be helped that his mission conflicted with those around. Over the Channel British spies were operating. The Air Raid Warden said,

**Air Raid Warden:** C'est la guerre.

**Narrator:** Had Gerhardt been captured, he would probably have been shot as a spy.

As for Captain, his loss was felt keenly by those who knew him. He wouldn't have wanted a fuss, but the men had a whip round for a memorial to stand outside the pub. The inscription eroded by time and salty air can only just be made out today, 'Died performing his duty. Captain, a friend to all Jolly Sailors.'

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