

The Toilet Caper

The shingle above her office door read: JANICE JELLIE. P.I.

I can sting it-- I can solve it!

Janice's potential client crossed and uncrossed her eight legs. Between crocodile tears flowing from her eyes, she stammered "I lost him. My husband was urinating and...and..."

Janice interrupted, "This isn't a urologist's office. There's one on the corner next to the *Fish 'N Chips*."

Mrs. Octopusaurus' bulbous head wobbled back and forth, "He rolled off the bed, swam to the bathroom, and I listened to his stream until it dripped to conclusion. The toilet flushed. I waited." She sank deeper into the clamshell sofa. "He never returned. He's been kidnapped."

"There, there. You'll have to cease crying and stop slowly crossing and uncrossing your legs."

Sam Squirt, Janice's squid assistant, hadn't yet scribbled a note. His eyes were wide open peering perilously at the lady octopus' feminine deep-sea treasure.

Mrs. "O" apologized and pulled her skirt forward over her eight knees. "It worked for Cherry Stone in *Basic Fish Stink*."

Janice got down to business. "How can you be so certain he's been kidnapped? You don't want to waste paying me twenty-five clams an hour plus per diem, nautical mileage." *She looks wealthy enough dressed in a strapless Armanopod, though why she couldn't afford panties?*

"They left a note." Mrs. O yanked open her Aquaphone. A photo revealed a red lipstick scrawled message across the bathroom mirror--"We've got your husband. Don't contact the authorities or we'll kill him. The Reptailians."

Janice squinted in fear. *The Reptilians--the toughest cartel terrorizing the bay.*

“Reptilians? My rate is double.”

“I’ll pay you whatever you want to get him back.”

“Why do you want him back so much? Haven’t you watched any reality TV shows, like *Desperate Seahorse Wives*?”

With her head hidden underneath a blanket of tentacles, she whispered, “I love him.”

“Stop the torrent,” Janice said, handing her the last box of tissues. “I’ll take the case.”

Mrs. O stood up, stuck out one tentacle, and fist bumped Janice’s. She then backstroked out of the PI’s office.

Janice ordered Sam to research everything there might be on the couple Octopusaurus—phone records, insurance and bank transactions, hangouts and hang-ins, and see if he could dig up any piece of bay mud on the missing/pissing Otto and/or his ever-tearful, octo-legged Olivia. Janice instructed him to be careful, but she knew if Sam encountered problems he could blow black ink out his rear and escape in a dark, watery cloud.

“You think she’s telling the truth, J.J.?” Sam asked.

“The truth? You know I can’t handle the truth!” She retorted without any apologies to *A Few Good Mermen*. “Not a bit! There’s something sucky with her octopi story. Reptilians wouldn’t win a Spelling Bee, but I can’t believe they would misspell their own nom de guerre with *Reptailians*. Besides, they don’t like our Quahog Bay waters.”

...

Janice caught the outgoing morning tide and floated over to the O’s mansion. A Bay-to-Shore Plumbing Van was parked in the Driveway.

A sponge was weeding plankton from the garden. Janice told him she had come to investigate the toilet. He mistakenly stereotyped her as a plumber. She retorted, “Not every

plumber's male." He re-retorted, "The ones which Mrs. O has had to fix her pipes have been."

A shrimpy butler answered the doorbell, raising his whiskers, his face turning lobster red, like he'd been boiled. Upon her inquiry as to where the bathroom might be located, he simply pointed his tail in the direction of the coral spiral staircase.

The bathroom confirmed Janice's suspicions—the toilet seat was down! Either hubby is transgender OR he pees sitting down OR Mrs. O is lying?

A salty voice whispered in Janice's ear, "*Follow the drain lines.*"

Without hesitation, she hopped in the bowl, her tentacle pulling the toilet's lever down. She swished and swooshed from one pipe to the other, sloshing and slapping against their sides. Reaching a dark and murky cavern? After floating to the surface, she looked down and realized this was the O's Olympic-sized swimming pool; they had not treated it for green algae.

Her eyes adjusted to the lack of light. The gardener and butler were "gills-up", murdered like fish bait. *Who and what killed them so fast?*

Janice had not been hired to solve a double homicide. She dialed the Chief of Aquatic Police (COAP) and requested he investigate. An old, bearded manatee, the COAP would need a few hours to wallow his way over.

The list of suspects has narrowed...but Mrs. O is the only sea creature I've met who is still alive.

Janice found Olivia sprawled in her living room on a white whale hooked rug. She said the kidnapers had called. Their ransom was for the couple's gold and silver doubloons they had collected from shipwrecked pirates' ships. Worth more than a million clams, the booty was stashed in the couple's conch safe. She'd been ordered to flush them down the toilet.

"It's okay," Mrs. O said, "We have everything insured."

Sam called. He told Janice that there is a company—Bay-to-Shore Plumbing—which has been bilking homeowners up and down the intracoastal waterway for phony plumbing repairs.

Janice evaluated the information. *If Mr. O had uncovered the proof to catch the scammers, then they would have had reason to kidnap and ransom him? Maybe the servants learned of the scam as well, leading to their premature demise.*

As instructed, Mrs. O flushed a burlap bag of coins down the well-functioning toilet. Knowing where they would discharge, the cephalopod and metazoan then hid behind the pool house and waited.

Two stingrays wearing plumbers' overalls and a diminutive octopus other arrived....

Jumping out and into the dark green waters, Mrs. O shouted, "Otto how could you?"

"Olivia, I didn't want to hurt you."

"But why?"

"Money. I over-played my bit oyster-coins in the fish market, losing everything."

"We could've downsized. We could've moved in with our kids. We could've..."

"No. My plan was fool proof, until the spongy gardener and shrimpy butler saw me exiting from the pool. They blackmailed me and I had to deal with them. I didn't count on you hiring a private detective and her finding me out so fast."

"And the stingrays? They were in on it?"

"These two? No. They've been contacting everyone in our pod, offering cut-rate plumbing repairs. They just happened to be swimming in with me."

Mr. O's confession was cut short. The COAP arrived. Mr. O and the alleged scammers surrendered and were seashell manacled. No exciting chase scene. No one moves fast underwater.

Janice and Mrs. O watched as the police and criminals paddled away.

“Sorry about your husband,” Janice said, “But there’s one thing he didn’t explain—why did he put that lipstick note on the bathroom mirror, implicating the Reptilians?”

“I’ll get him a good lawyer,” Mrs. O said, changing the subject.

The detective massaged her jellied head, “But he knew everything was insured...and he really was in no danger...and he knew you would pay the ransom...So why leave a note? Which would trigger you involving a private detective or the police...and him being found out faster?”

Mrs. O returned to and reclined on her white whale sofa. She turned to her side and smiled at Janice. “I’ll put your check in the mail. Now float along. I’m expecting some company to visit shortly.”

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