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Opening extract from

Pugs of the Frozen North

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PUGS OF THE FROZEN NORTH



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ONE

Winter came in the night, like a white sheet laid over the world. It came so cold and so fast that the waves of the ocean froze as they rolled. The good ship *Lucky Star* froze with them, trapped tight in the suddenly solid sea.

Shen the cabin boy, the youngest member of the crew, stirred in his sleep as the sounds of rippling and splashing faded into frozen silence. He snuggled deeper under the covers, trying to keep warm. Into the silence came other noises. First, the creaking of metal as

the ice tightened its grip upon the old ship's sides. Then the voice of Captain Jeggings, bellowing, 'All hands on deck!'

The crew bumbled blinking from their bunks. Able Seaman Bo, Mungbean the ship's cook, and Shen. They stumbled out on deck and stared at the frozen waves which reared up all around them, stiff and white as giant meringues.

'Don't just stand there!' shouted Captain Jeggings, hauling on an icy rope. 'Get us out of here!'

The rope snapped in his hands with a sound like breaking glass. The *Lucky Star* groaned and quivered as the ice clenched tighter.

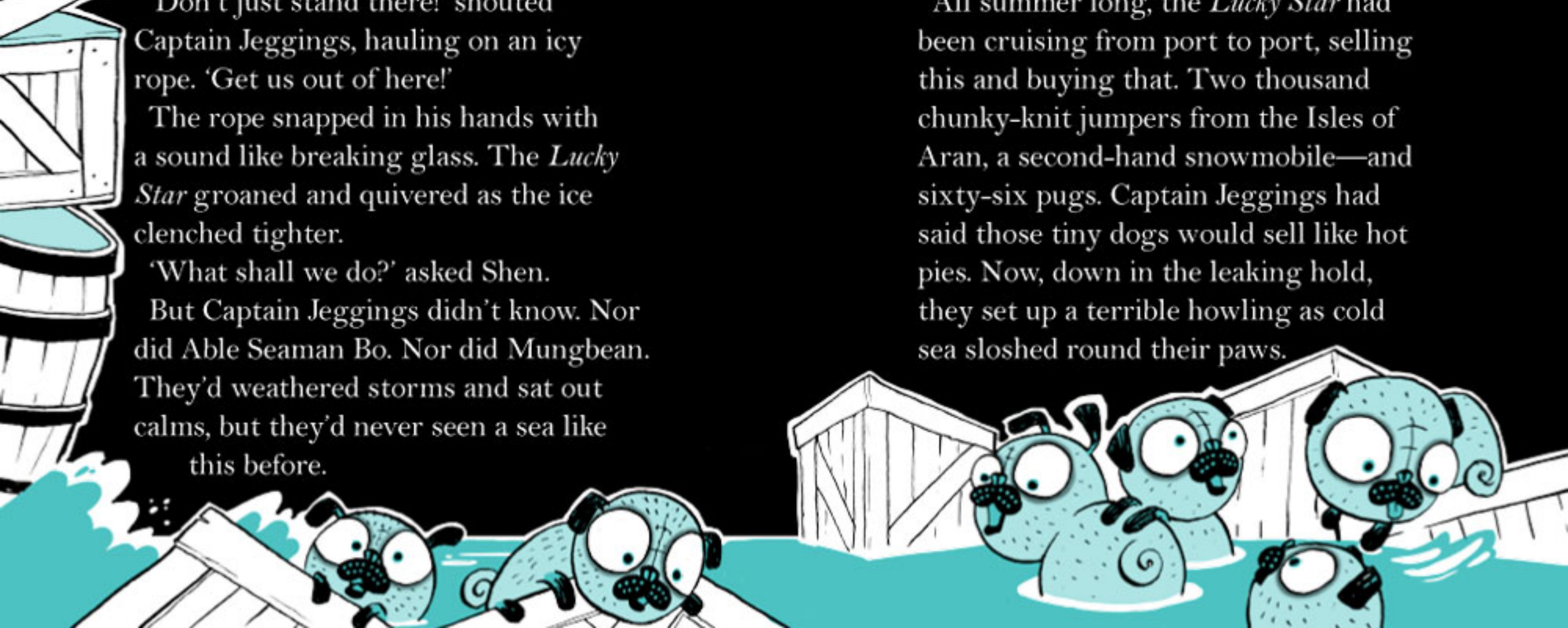
'What shall we do?' asked Shen.

But Captain Jeggings didn't know. Nor did Able Seaman Bo. Nor did Mungbean. They'd weathered storms and sat out calms, but they'd never seen a sea like this before.

Creak. Crunch. Big tusks of ice pushed the planks apart and pierced the *Lucky Star*'s sides. *Slosh. Gurgle.* Cold black water which hadn't frozen yet came swirling in. The ship sagged, and all the icicles that decked her rigging tinkled cheerfully. But Captain Jeggings couldn't see anything to be cheerful about.

'The cargo!' he shouted. 'We must save the cargo!'

All summer long, the *Lucky Star* had been cruising from port to port, selling this and buying that. Two thousand chunky-knit jumpers from the Isles of Aran, a second-hand snowmobile—and sixty-six pugs. Captain Jeggings had said those tiny dogs would sell like hot pies. Now, down in the leaking hold, they set up a terrible howling as cold sea sloshed round their paws.



'The dogs!' shouted Shen. 'We must save the dogs!'

Mungbean and Bo went running down the steep stairways which led to the cargo holds and came struggling back up with crates of jumpers. Captain Jeggings winched the snowmobile over the ship's side. Meanwhile, Shen upended the boxes where the pugs slept. The tiny dogs raced up on deck and jumped off the *Lucky Star*'s sides on to the ice.

Shen had heard people talk about rats leaving a sinking ship before, but he'd never heard of pugs leaving a freezing one. There's a first time for everything, he thought, as he dragged the sack which held their leads up on to deck and threw it after them.

The *Lucky Star* shuddered again, squeezed in the teeth of the ice. Rivets popped out of the deck. The funnel trembled like a chopped tree.



shouted Captain Jeggings, jumping over the side.

But Shen had thought of something else that needed to be saved. 'The dog food! It's still on board!'

'It'll have to stay there, then!' yelled Bo, jumping down on to the ice with Mungbean. Shen passed the smallest of the pugs down to them, then jumped after them.

With a final heave, the ice crushed the old ship flat.

Shen and the pugs stood and shivered, while Captain Jeggings and the others got the snowmobile ready. Its engine coughed and snarled as they started it up. Into its trailer they piled the crates of cargo—but there was no room for the dogs.

'We can't leave them behind!' wailed Shen.

'Well, we can't stay here with them,' said Captain Jeggings. 'This ice might melt as quickly as it came, and then where would we be? Way out at sea



without a ship under us. Awkward.' (He had told Shen that the sixty-six pugs would sell like hot pies, but he meant that they would sell *in* hot pies: his auntie ran a pie shop at home, and she was always looking for new ingredients. They were by far the least valuable bit of his cargo, so he had decided to leave them behind.)

'Maybe they'll follow us!' said Shen. He climbed aboard the snowmobile with Bo and Mungbean and the captain. 'Come on doggies!' he called to the pugs.

The dogs looked up at him, heads on one side. Their hot breath steamed

and smouldered in the cold air like the breath of sixty-six tiny dragons.

The snowmobile set off with a roar. The tower of crates in its trailer teetered and swayed as it went weaving its way between the frozen waves.

The pugs sat where they were, and watched it go.

'Come on!' shouted Shen. But they didn't seem to understand.





'Wait for me, Captain!' he yelled, and jumped down off the snowmobile. The frozen waves were slipperier than hills of glass. He slithered over them, back to where the pugs sat, and when they saw Shen coming their tails began to wag and they ran to meet him.

'Come on, doggies!' he said, patting sixty-six small, soft heads and getting licked by sixty-six small, soft tongues. 'You've got to follow Captain Jeggings . . .'

But when he turned to look for the snowmobile, it was nowhere to be seen. Either Captain Jeggings hadn't heard when Shen shouted for it to wait . . . or he had decided that Shen and sixty-six pugs weren't worth waiting for.

