

**The Story of Little Louie  
By Nicola J Bolton**

## The Story of Little Louie

It was a bad day at the Sober Doberman Shipbuilding Company. Nothing was going right, least of all the building of a new container ship that Felixstowe port had specifically ordered.

"I can't believe that you could make such a STUPID mistake!" the managing director yelled at one of the builders.

"It's perfectly formed, sir..." the bespectacled man meekly replied. "A beautifully built ship...just one tiny problem, that's all."

"You've built it the wrong size, man! It's not even half the size of a standard container ship!"

"Yes...I know, sir. The designers mixed up the blueprints and we used the measurements meant for a ferry instead. I blame the printers for not printing them clearly..."

The managing director resembled a volcano that was about to erupt.

"Printers? I blame you! You can't read a blueprint properly, that's your trouble. Look at that ship, just look at it! Felixstowe port has ordered a brand new container ship capable of rivaling the Emma Maersk in size. And what do you do? Build one that couldn't even match a fishing trawler!"

In the dry dock, the container ship in question was blissfully unaware of the uproar he was causing. He certainly was small, no question about that - a perfectly built miniature container ship. At first glance he resembled an inshore coaster.

"Cover it up or something!" yelled the managing director. "The boss of Felixstowe port will be here soon and I don't want him to see..." There was a knock on the door.

"The manager of Felixstowe port has arrived, sir," the secretary announced.

"Oh no! Er, send him in then."

The Port Manager was nervously ushered into the dockyard, along with Captain John Dory, one of the port's container ship captains.

"Ah, don't you just love a dockyard," Captain Dory said. "The smell of fresh paint...engine oil, sea air..."

"I've come to see my new ship," the Port Manager said excitedly. "You did say it would be ready and waiting." Suddenly he noticed the tiny container ship in the dry dock.

"What's that?"

"What's what, sir?"

"That model ship! Oh how cute! I didn't know you made miniature container ships!!"

"Er, this IS your new ship, sir."

The Port Manager's face fell. "WHAT? I ordered a ship, not a canoe!" Captain Dory was struggling to contain his laughter and had to keep pretending that he was sneezing.

"What's the matter with you? Do you need a glass of water?"

"Never mind him, I'm the one in need of a drink!" the Port Manager gasped. "I shall be the laughing stock of Felixstowe! How is my port expected to compete with the likes of Rotterdam if I use a ship as small as that?"

"Well it's a beautifully built ship, sir, he just needs smaller containers! Er, I'm willing to reduce the price a little..."

"Half price, you mean!"

"Sold! He's yours! Would you like him wrapped, or will you take him as he is?"

Before the Port Manager had a chance to reply, Captain Dory interrupted. "We haven't had the naming ceremony yet! You can't launch a ship without a name!"

"Well said, Captain. Perhaps you'd like to do the honors?" The shipyard manager handed him half a cup of lukewarm coffee. "Sorry, we don't have any bottles of champagne!"

"Very well. What shall I call him?"

"How about 'White Elephant'?" the Port Manager shouted.

"Now, now, don't be mean, sir. We wouldn't want to hurt the poor ship's feelings, would we? Hmm, what about Little Louie?"

"An excellent name, Captain!"

With that, Captain Dory stood in front of the ship and splashed the coffee on his bow.

"I hereby name this vessel 'Little Louie'. May God bless all containers and crew that travel on him."

The shipbuilders all cheered. And a big smile appeared on Little Louie's face.

"At last, I have a name!" he thought. "It suits me! I can't wait to go to my new home."

After the ceremony, Captain Dory agreed to tow Little Louie back to Felixstowe using a tugboat.

"What on earth am I going to do with this tiny ship?" wailed the Port Manager. "I'll have to find some kind of use for him. This is a nightmare."

"Cheer up, sir," Captain Dory replied. "I'm sure everything will turn out alright. Hey, sit back and enjoy the journey home because I'm about to play this excellent new CD I got. It's called '101 Greatest Sea Shanties'."

"Sea Shanties?" The Port Manager's face fell. If there was one type of music he absolutely hated, it was sea shanties! But it's never wise to disagree with the master of a ship, or in this case a tugboat, so he simply

gave a pained smile.

Seconds later, the bridge vibrated to the strains of 'What Shall We Do with a Drunken Sailor' blasting out at full volume.

Captain Dory was in his element. "Hey ho, and up she rises!" he screeched in an extremely off-key voice, whilst the poor Port Manager looked to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"Shouldn't you turn to starboard here?" he yelled.

"Whoops, sorry sir. I nearly missed the turning back to Felixstowe!" He made a sudden turn, and this caused the towing hook to break.

"Hey!" Little Louie yelled as the tugboat sailed off into the distance without him. He blew his horn, but the music Captain Dory was playing was so loud that nobody heard him.

"So much for being towed!" the little container ship groaned. "Good job I got fueled up this morning. I guess I'll just have to find my own way back to Felixstowe." He started his engines and began to follow in the tugboat's wake. Being small and without any cargo to weigh him down meant Little Louie could sail faster than the average container ship. At 25 and a half knots he reached his full speed and he was making good time.

"I can't wait to see Felixstowe and all the other ships. I hope they're looking forward to meeting me as much as I'm looking forward to meeting them!"

It was an "as usual" kind of day in Felixstowe. As usual, Rocky the container ship was being loaded with containers, ready for another trip. Nosey and Lofty the dockside cranes were gossiping as usual. As usual, Terry the docker was attempting to do the Times Crossword, and as usual not succeeding.

"This is a slightly boring day, hey Rocky?" Marina moaned to Rocky as she sailed up beside him.

"The port sure has been dull recently. What we need are some new vessels to liven the place up," Rocky replied.

"You're saying I'M boring?"

"N-no Marina, of course not! But we do need some new faces round here, don't you agree?"

"I hear there's a new ship coming to join our fleet. A huge container ship. Apparently he's even bigger than you, Rocky," Marina said. Rocky didn't like the sound of that. He liked being the biggest ship in the port because it made him feel important.

"How much bigger than me? Even bigger than Emma Maersk?"

"Well, you can see for yourself, they'll be towing him to the port really soon!"

At that moment, the tugboat arrived back in the port. The Port Manager quickly disembarked and glared at the line of container ships staring at

him with bemused expressions.

"Go on, have your laugh now and get it over with. I know it's a small ship..."

Rocky blinked in disbelief. "Yeah, small is right. I can't see it, it's that small!"

"What?" The Port Manager looked in horror as he saw the broken tow rope. "Good grief, it's gone! We've lost it! Oh I'm ruined! I'll never get that OBE now, will I?"

"How can he lose a brand new ship?" Marina asked. "Maybe the ship lost them!" Suddenly there was the loud blast from a horn.

"That's a ship approaching," said Captain Dory. "Better send the pilot boats out to guide it in."

But Little Louie didn't need pilots to guide him into port. He was so small he quickly and easily sailed in.

"Aww, a model container ship! I didn't know they made those! Are you lost?" Rocky called out to Little Louie.

"Nope, I'm most definitely found! I'm Little Louie, the new ship! Pleased to meet you all!"

And it was at that point that a deathly silence fell over the port. That kind of silence you always get when something turns out not as you expected. Little Louie waited for a reply but nothing happened.

"Did I say something wrong?" he asked.

"New container ship, my stern!" Rocky sniggered. "Don't make me laugh, is this some kind of joke? Being a cargo vessel is a serious business. No room for amateurs in this job, isn't that right, Marina?"

"Absolutely. This is a working port, not a playground for novelty boats!"

"Er, he IS the new ship," the Port Manager replied. "Glad you...er, made it back, Little Louie. I was worried we'd lost you."

"I bet he was secretly hoping he'd sunk!" Rocky whispered to Marina, which wasn't a very nice thing to say.

"At least you don't need to worry about him being bigger than you, Rocky!" The two ships burst out laughing.

Little Louie sailed over to them. "Hi you two. What's so funny?"

"Did you hear something?" said Rocky.

"I did but it was so quiet I couldn't tell what it was."

Little Louie's voice wasn't quiet at all but he still didn't realize they were making fun of him. The louder he shouted, the less they heard him! He got the message and gave up.

"Heh, with ships as big as you two I guess the air's pretty thin for you up there? Maybe that's why you can't hear me," he muttered sarcastically.

Rocky turned on him at once. "What did you say?" he snapped, his engines revving up. "You making fun of us?"

"Well, you seem to be making fun of me," Little Louie replied, unafraid of the bigger ship.

"That's because you're a little two ton twerp," Rocky continued. "Let's get one thing clear. Felixstowe is a busy, important container port. It has big ships. It needs big ships, and not small, useless boats like you, so clear off!"

Marina frowned at Little Louie. "Just ignore him and he'll eventually go away."

Little Louie was hurt but didn't show it. "As you wish," he replied, sailing off. "But if you're thinking I'm leaving Felixstowe then you're wrong! This is my new home!"

"I sure showed him, didn't I, Marina!" Rocky grinned. "Come on, we need to speak to the other ships about this troublesome pest."

"Alright then," Marina replied, although secretly she thought Rocky's behavior had gone too far. But she wasn't going to admit this. After all, nobody wants to alienate themselves from their peers, do they? Marina and Rocky were the most popular ships in Felixstowe and anything they said, others tended to listen to.

Well, Rocky was very nasty indeed and said some horrible things about Little Louie to the other container ships. And whenever the container ships saw Little Louie approaching, they would turn around so their sterns were facing him!

"Look out everyone, here he comes! Hard a starboard!"

Nearby, a mermaid named Cornelia had just arrived in Felixstowe.

"At last I've found it!" she exclaimed, poking her head out of the water. "The Lost City of Atlantis! The perfect holiday destination ...wait a minute!"

Cornelia looked around at all the cranes and ships. "This isn't Atlantis! Where in the name of Neptune am I? I knew I shouldn't have taken that left turn at the Dogger Bank! Never ask a seal for directions!"

She pulled herself out of the water and sat on on the dockside. "Now that I'm here I might as well get to know this place." She looked at the sign above which read 'PORT OF FELIXSTOWE'.

"Felix Toes?" Cornelia wondered. "Wonder who Felix is and what happened to his toes? Looks like a fun port, and as I'm a mermaid who enjoys ship-spotting, I think I'm going to enjoy being here!" Then she noticed the container ships and Little Louie.

"What are those ships up to? Are they playing a game?"

"Why won't you speak to me?" Little Louie said. "I only want to be friends with you!"

"GO AWAY!" they replied in unison. Poor Little Louie turned and chugged off sadly.

"What's this?" Cornelia mused. "Poor little guy, there he goes without a friend in the world! What a load of nasty bullies! Hmm, I always thought container ships were big, ugly vessels and it seems I was right! Give me a ferry any day!" Cornelia jumped into the water to follow Little Louie.

Little Louie was hiding behind the harbor wall.

"No one will see me here," he sobbed, tears running onto his deck. "Even this wall is bigger than me."

"I'm not bigger than you," a friendly voice answered. "In fact, all ships are bigger than me!"

"If you're a ship, go away!" Little Louie shouted.

"I'm not a ship," the voice replied. "Why don't you come out, Little Louie? I like to see who I'm talking to."

"How do you know my name?"

"I've been watching you, Little Louie, and I like you! Won't you come out and then we can talk?"

Little Louie reluctantly sailed out. He looked round. There was nobody around.

"Are you invisible? I can't see you!"

"Down here, I'm sat on this buoy," the voice replied.

Little Louie looked down. "There you are! Oh, you're a mermaid!" Little Louie was amazed. "But my captain told me that mermaids only existed in old sailor's tales."

"Hey, don't believe everything your captain tells you! We mermaids aren't supposed to come into contact with humans - just to appear out at sea and sing but disappear before they get too close. It keeps the old myths going, you see! Word of advice, never ask a seal for directions."

"Why?" asked Little Louie.

"Because they can't read maps! There I was out in the North Sea, looking for the Lost City of Atlantis. I'd planned to go there on holiday. I meet this seal who was paying some money in at the Dogger Bank. I ask him for directions. Now, a seal won't help you unless you give him a fish so I gave him two, and he gave me wrong directions! That's why I ended up here. But I'm glad I did because I met you!" she smiled. "I'm Cornelia, by the way, nice to meet you. Anyways, I didn't come here to talk about myself, I came to talk about you. I saw those other ships being really nasty to you."

"They all make fun of me because I'm such a small container ship," Little Louie sniffed.

"You'll start to list if you carry on crying like that," Cornelia said. "All those tears flooding your deck. Come on, cheer up. I'm your friend!"

"You want to be friends with a ship as small as me?"

"Even the smallest ships are huge compared to me. Trust me, I've seen container ships far smaller than you, in ports bigger than Toes of

Felix!"

Little Louie burst out laughing. "Toes of Felix! Ha ha ha! You mean Felixstowe?"

"There, it's great to see you happy at last!" Cornelia smiled. "I must be doing something right! But yes, there are hundreds of small container ships in the world. Being a small ship is actually very helpful. Alright, so you can't carry as much cargo as the big ships - but you can get into smaller ports, and the bigger ships can't! Small ships are essential for small ports and narrow channels with shallow waters."

"Gosh, I never thought about that!" Little Louie smiled, feeling better already.

"So I imagine those bigger ships pick on you because they're secretly jealous of you," Cornelia said.

"Mainly it's Rocky. He's kind of the 'top ship' in Felixstowe, all the others respect him."

Cornelia frowned and folded her arms. "Bullies don't deserve respect! It's about time his captain discovered what a nasty ship he's sailing!"

"Captain Dory? He's a pretty nice guy."

"Captain Dozy, more like," sniggered Cornelia. "Don't you worry, Little Louie, I'm going to teach that Rocky a lesson!"

"How?" the little container ship asked.

"Oh, wait and see. When we put our minds to it, we mermaids can do just about anything!"

Suddenly Cornelia looked down at the water. There was a dark shape moving under the surface.

"Is it a shark?" Little Louie asked. "Be careful, Cornelia! I don't want my only friend to be eaten!" But Cornelia wasn't afraid.

"I'd know that shape anywhere, it's a..."

With a splash, a seal popped his head out of the water. "Hello!" he said.

Cornelia's eyes widened. "I don't believe it! It's YOU!"

"Do you know this seal?" Little Louie said.

"Indeed I do! He's the rotter who gave me wrong directions!"

The seal looked crestfallen. "Oh, oh please, let me explain! I followed you here because I realized I'd given you wrong directions. But you swam so fast that I couldn't keep up with you! Oh, my name's George! Nice to meet you! I am a Common Seal, because it's not uncommon to see my type of seal."

The seal was such an innocent and happy creature that Cornelia couldn't stay angry with him for very long.

"I'm Cornelia." Turning to Little Louie, she added, "And this is my friend Little Louie."

"Wow, he looks like Big Louie to me!" George gasped. "Can he be friends with me too?"

Little Louie laughed. "Of course, George!"

"I bet you could carry lots and lots of tasty fish on your deck, couldn't you? Mmm, fish. Oh, that reminds me, I'm starving! Has anyone got any food?"

Cornelia smirked. The mentioning of fish had given her an idea.

"George, you can be of use after all," she said. "But first I must tell you about Little Louie, so listen carefully..." And the mermaid told the curious seal about how Little Louie had been bullied by the other ships.

"Poor ship!" George sniffed, wiping away tears from his eyes. "That's the saddest story I ever heard, Cornelia!"

"But you and I are going to help Little Louie by getting our own back on the ship who bullied him – Rocky. Will you help me?"

"Of course!" George replied happily. "This is very exciting! What are we going to do?"

"Follow me," Cornelia said, jumping off the buoy.

Little Louie was left to wonder what they were up to.

Over at Trinity Terminal, there was a refrigerated cargo ship full of frozen fish.

"I smell fish! Tasty fish!" George shouted, his mouth watering.

"Exactly," Cornelia replied. "Now I'm going to use my mermaid cunning here and operate this crane."

"Wow Cornelia, how do you do that?" the seal asked.

"Sorry, can't tell you, it's classified. Hee hee!"

Next morning, Felixstowe port was busier than ever. Container ships from China, Rotterdam and Singapore were all due to arrive today. Even the cranes had no time for gossiping today.

Rocky woke up early as usual. "Ahh, I love the smell of fresh sea air in the morning," he smiled. "I love the...UGGH! What's that revolting smell?" Marina came sailing past. "Oh man, what a disgusting smell! Rocky - it's you!"

Rocky was furious. "Are you saying I stink? I always use my deodorant, I'll have you know!"

"Er, it's on your deck - rotten fish!"

"AGGGGGHHHHH!" Rocky exclaimed.

"Hey Rocky, looks like graffiti artists struck again last night!" another ship interrupted. "I guess your hull was like a blank canvas to them."

Rocky was still in shock after discovering someone had dumped an entire crateload of fish onto his spotless deck. The stench was so bad that other ships avoided sailing too close to him. "What's wrong with my hull?" he said.

Nearby, Cornelia and George were watching.

"Hah, he's not so smug now, is he?" Cornelia laughed. "We had a lot

of fun last night, didn't we, playing noughts and crosses?"

"Oh yes!" George replied. "Although I lost all the games!"

"Dumping the fish on Rocky's deck was fun too!" Cornelia sniggered.

Captain John Dory was not happy when he discovered what had happened to his ship.

"It's a disgrace!" he shouted. "This port is supposed to be a secure area! I can't understand how someone could have gained access to the terminal and spraypainted a load of graffiti on my ship's hull! mean, noughts and crosses of all things - noughts and crosses! And how on earth did all that frozen haddock end up on his deck? It's almost as if they were playing games with us!"

"Calm down, Captain," the Port Manager replied. "We'll get Rocky cleaned up straight away and he'll be ready in time to pick up that cargo from Norway."

Outside, Rocky was sobbing.

"It's an outrage!" he wailed. "My beautiful blue hull is the pride of Felixstowe and I've been vandalized! Look at my hull, it's full of noughts and crosses. I can't sail to Norway with a hull like this! And my beautiful deck stinks of fish!"

Captain Dory walked out onto the quayside.

"Uh oh, looks like the boss arrived," said George. Cornelia looked at the captain. "Wow, he does cut a dashing figure in that uniform," she smiled.

"Hello Cornelia and George," Little Louie said, sailing over to the buoy where she and George were sitting.

"Louie, who's that guy?" Cornelia said, pointing to Captain Dory.

"Him? Oh that's the guy you called Captain Dozy last night. He's Rocky's captain."

"Oh ... well he doesn't look dozy. What's a handsome captain like him doing commanding a horrible bully ship like Rocky?"

"Cornelia loves the captain!" George teased, singing a song. "Sitting on the quay, K.I.S.S.I -"

Cornelia interrupted him before he could finish the song. "Any more of that and I'll push you into the sea!"

George wisely shut up!

"Gosh, did you really do that to Rocky's hull?" Little Louie asked.

Cornelia nodded proudly. "I told you I was going to teach him a lesson. Actually, the noughts and crosses were George's idea. I dumped all the fish on his deck though. It was careless of those dockers to leave those cans of spray paint lying around too, wasn't it?"

Little Louie smiled. "Everybody's ignoring Rocky because he smells so bad. He doesn't like it one bit!"

Later that day, having been cleaned up, Rocky was ordered to sail to Norway to deliver a valuable cargo. The container ship was in a black mood. A very black mood. In fact his mood was as black as liquorice ... well, you get the general idea.

"Lousy vandals!" Rocky fumed as he headed out of the port. "Why was I the only ship in the harbor that was picked on?" As he headed out into the open seas, he noticed Little Louie being loaded with containers.

"Was it you? Did you sabotage my hull, you little two ton twerp?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Little Louie replied innocently. Cornelia and George sniggered.

The incident had caused Rocky's crossing to be delayed. Halfway across the North Sea, Rocky decided that he would take a short cut across the Dogger Bank to make up for lost time, although he had been warned many times never to do this. The sea around there was extremely shallow and there was a danger of running aground on the sandbank. But Rocky was a very headstrong ship and was used to getting his own way.

"If my captain was on board, he'd be furious," he smirked. "But I set off without him, ha ha, so no-one can tell me what to do!"

Back in Felixstowe, Captain John Dory was hopping mad!

"You let Rocky set off without checking to make sure he had a captain on board? That ship is in so much trouble when he gets back! Ships know the rules! NEVER set sail without a captain on board - it's a strict rule! Rocky is testing my patience lately, he's getting far too cocky. Why can't he set a good example to the port like Little Louie?"

Little Louie just smiled proudly.

Out at sea, the weather had taken a turn for the worse. The waves began to get higher and higher and were pounding Rocky's hull.

"Grr!" the container ship grumbled. "How I hate the North Sea! It's always rough and gale force winds always seem to spring up when you least expect them! If this carries on, I'll get seaweed in my funnel!" Rocky didn't know it, but he was drifting dangerously off course.

"Oh I wish my captain would give me some proper directions and then - oops, I forgot, I don't have my captain onboard." Rocky gulped. He realized that it had been rather foolish to leave port without his crew.

Suddenly, Rocky felt his keel strike something. He ground to a halt abruptly, shuddering from bow to stern.

"Oh no!" the container ship gasped. He revved up his engines and spun his propeller as fast as he could, but it was no use - Rocky had run aground on the Dogger Bank. Luckily for him, it was sand and not sharp

rocks or poor Rocky may have been in an even worse situation.

"Hey! Can anyone hear me?" He blew his horn several times. But it was no use, there were no ships nearby to hear him. Rocky wished he could activate his radio, but only his crew could do that - and Rocky had set sail alone.

"Oh, what a stupid vessel I am!" Rocky sniffed miserably as the icy winds and waves lashed against him. "I wish I'd done as I was told and waited instead of rushing off!" Poor Rocky began to cry, but there was no-one out there to hear his sobs, save for a lone dolphin who poked his head out of the water to see what all the noise was.

Back in Felixstowe, everyone was growing concerned for Rocky. The storm was easing but there had been no communication from him.

"According to the Norwegian port manager, he never arrived," Captain Dory said. "This is most worrying. Send out a search and rescue helicopter at once!"

The helicopter soon located Rocky, who cheered up at the sight of it circling round him.

"Hooray, I'm saved! They've found me!"

A few hours later, Rocky heard the sound of a ship's horn. He opened his eyes. There was a ship approaching.

"Who's that?" Rocky wondered. As the ship grew closer, he could see it was ... Little Louie! Also, a tugboat was following close behind.

Rocky blushed with shame. "Great, this is all I need," he mumbled. He suddenly felt extremely guilty for the way he'd treated the small container ship.

"Go on, have a good laugh! I deserve it!" Rocky said as Little Louie sailed alongside him. Being so small, the shallower water posed no danger to him.

"I'm not here to laugh at you, Rocky - I came to collect that valuable cargo from you. I'll carry on to Norway and deliver it for you, and Hornblower the tug is going to tow you back to Felixstowe. Don't worry, Rocky, you'll be fine!"

Rocky burst into tears. "Wahhhh! I was so scared! I thought I was going to sink!"

"It's okay to be scared. I would've been scared too!"

"Hey Louie...um...I feel really terrible. I've been so horrible to you and so have the other ships. I'm a nasty bully! I'm really sorry!"

Little Louie smiled. "Apology accepted, Rocky. You know, people will like you a lot more if you're nice instead of showing off all the time."

Rocky smiled back. "I think I've learned my lesson."

Rocky was towed back to Felixstowe, where Captain Dory gave him a

stern telling off.

"I should have you confined to a dry dock for the rest of the week for disobeying maritime orders like that!" he shouted.

"Yes, sir. I'm very sorry, sir," Rocky replied in a small voice. "I definitely won't ever do anything like that again. I'm a reformed ship!"

"Good job Little Louie was able to deliver that cargo to Norway. His small size meant he could sail a lot faster."

"I never realized how useful smaller container ships can be," said Rocky.

"All ships are useful, not just big ones," Captain Dory replied. "Anyway, I expect best behavior from now on, Rocky. All Felixstowe ships are expected to set a good example to other ports around the world!" "Captain Dory looks so dashing when he's angry!" Cornelia sighed. George had an idea. "Hmm," he giggled. "Could you lift me up onto the quayside? It's hard shuffling up these stone steps."

"What on earth for?" the mermaid replied. "Oh, very well then. Oof - you weigh a ton, George!" She struggled to lift the seal up.

"Thanks!" he said, quickly shuffling across the terminal.

"Hey, don't wander away from the edge, you'll be seen - or flattened by one of the tugs! The Landguard terminal is no place for playing around, it can be dangerous!"

The seal ignored her and continued, blissfully unaware of the cranes and dockers.

"GEORGE!" Cornelia yelled, trying to avoid being spotted herself. "You crazy seal, where are you going? Well, don't blame me if you get run over!"

George wasn't as quick on land as he was in the water and it took him a while to reach the terminal office. The dockers failed to notice the seal, as they were far too busy working. The office door was ajar. Captain Dory was inside, talking on his mobile phone. George pushed the door open with his nose and waddled inside.

"Hello, Mr Captain!" George said, but he couldn't talk to humans in the same way as he could to Cornelia. Captain Dory hung up and looked round. "Who's playing silly beggars?" he shouted. "Rocky, that had better not be you making those seal noises!"

George tugged at Captain Dory's trouser leg.

"What the ... AGH! A seal! What's a seal doing in the office?" He was so shocked that he fell backwards into his chair.

George was desperate for the captain to follow him outside.

"How did you get in here, boy?" Captain Dory said. "This is no place

for you. I'd better phone the Animal Welfare guys."

George tugged at his trouser leg again.

"Are you trying to tell me something? Do you want me to follow you?" Captain Dory followed the seal outside. "Where are we going?"

Cornelia was growing concerned. Suddenly she saw George approaching, followed by Captain Dory!

"Yikes, I'd better dive under the water before he sees me!" she gasped, but George wasn't going to let her hide this time! Summoning all his strength, he leapt into the water and grabbed hold of her tail.

Captain Dory peered over the edge. "Oh, you've caught a fish! Blimey, looks like a big fish!"

"Let go of my tail, you flipped fiend!" Cornelia shouted. She froze. Captain Dory was staring right at her!

"Great Seas of Neptune - now you've done it, George! Humans aren't supposed to see us merpeople!"

George looked sad. "But Cornelia, I thought you liked him, so I brought him to see you."

Cornelia smiled. "That's true ... so I guess it's okay to break the rules just this once!"

"Pleased to meet you," Captain Dory said, holding out his hand. "It's a great honor to have a mermaid in the Port of Felixstowe!"

"Pleased to meet you too," Cornelia replied. "May I say how handsome you look in your uniform?"

Captain Dory blushed crimson. "Um, why thank you!" he stammered.

George found this amusing. "How'd you do that? You made his face go all red - is it magic?"

"It's called flattery, George! You should try it sometime - it works wonders!"

Next morning, Little Louie arrived back in Felixstowe. He saw all the big container ships watching him and prepared himself for another round of taunts and nasty looks. But all the ships smiled at him and shouted: "Welcome back, Little Louie! We've missed you!"

"It's good to be home!" Little Louie replied.

Rocky and Marina came out to greet him. "Thanks for delivering that cargo, Louie. You really saved the day yesterday!" Rocky said.

"Oh, it was nothing!" Little Louie replied modestly.

Captain Dory came rushing onto the quayside. "Welcome back, Little Louie! I'm glad you've returned - there's a lot of work to do. We've got more work than usual thanks to you! By the way - do I look smart in this uniform? I think I look rather dashing!"

Rocky rolled his eyes. "My captain's been acting odd all day. I think

he's got a secret admirer!"

Little Louie smiled as he saw Cornelia and George sat on the quayside.

"I thought mermaids weren't supposed to talk to humans!"

"We're not -but I made an exception for Captain Dory!"

So Little Louie became one of the most popular ships in Felixstowe, and Rocky became his friend. Although he was the smallest container ship in the port, he was just as useful as the bigger ships!

And here ends the story of Little Louie!

















