

The rattling call of a kingfisher shook my daydreaming. I watched the kingfisher's flight over a deep pool in the Nii Li river shadowed by a large boulder. Salmon lived in that deep pool. Between that pool and one further downstream, the clear river riffled over colorful rocks. Midway along the river course, a family of mergansers paddled upstream. The redheaded mother swam in front, defiant wisps from her shaggy red crest trailing out from the back of her head, her chicks frantically paddling behind. She dove gracefully and surfaced with a small fish. Her chicks dove for smaller prey. I smiled as each surfaced, tilting back their little heads to gobble down their bugs and tadpoles.

I fitted my fins on my feet as I stepped into the water. Dragonflies circled over the surface and the merganser family glided by unperturbed as I swam to a big boulder with a deep pool below. Fitting on my mask, I took a breath and dove into the cold clear water.

Light and shadow played on the rocky bottom and large, adult salmon patrolled. I relaxed. I encountered a big fish with rainbow-colored hues on his side, a steelhead - the kind of salmon that returns to the sea after spawning. He turned downstream and I followed. If I had pectoral fins like him instead of arms, I could keep up. Swimming as fast as I could, kicking my feet in my flippers, how much faster could I swim if I had a powerful tail? Gradually, the big steelhead disappeared downstream and group of smolts appeared. We swam together towards the estuary. There, they would meet the others and form a great school of fish, their silvery scales flashing in the light. Turning north together, they would travel up to Alaskan waters. Older salmon would teach them what to eat and how to avoid the nets. Then, when they developed into adults, they'd discover their secret. They would return to this river and fulfill the promise made long ago. Tasting the water, mixed with sea near the Nii Li's mouth, they'd recall the taste of their birthplace. As they traveled upriver, the snouts of the males would curve, their backs turn pink,

and they'd swim vigorously upstream, back to that same pool I'd entered earlier. Graceful and elegant, no movement wasted, they would find a mate and spawn. Then they'd surrender their bodies so life could continue.

I continued following the fish to a widening in the river; we'd reached the estuary. I stood up in water reaching my thighs. I clambered onto the sandy bank and looked around.

Sam was there at the river's mouth, seeing me arrive. Painful memories of the accident and the aftermath washed away, by his love. For now.

A long sinuous bar of sand protected the estuary from the ocean.. Flocks of shorebirds raced along the tideline, feeding in the receding tide. Western sandpipers ran along the sand with their short, quick steps, probing the wet sand. Dowitchers, with their long bills, rapidly probed the sand like a sewing machine needle. The fat grey bodies of harbor seals sat sunning in the distance. A rocky headland lay on the opposite bank and lines of breakers ran up to the beach, forming white lacy veils on the sand.

“Look!” Sam called. “What’s swimming? Over there.”

An otter. He dove, his lithe body bending into the water; and surfaced farther out. He turned his furry head, looking inquisitively at me.

This river, this otter, those mergansers, these salmon, Sam and me. I was part of this all. Hundreds of thousands of salmon, pink and silver, lively swimming upstream, jumping over obstacles, heading back to their home streams. Wild salmon, the threads that weave rivers, animals, people, and oceans together. More salmon would help the orca thrive.

I could do something to make a difference in the world. Although I was unable to speak up myself, scientists were respected. Jane Goodall got the world’s attention. Maybe I could publish research about how restoring salmon habitat could save biodiversity. Maybe I’d

eventually find the courage to stand before the podium explaining to decision makers how wild animals power our ecosystems. Somehow, I'd get everyone to treat the world with reverence. I resolved to do all that and help save wild salmon.