

“EVENING! EVENING! EVENING!”

Once, they say, there was a fisherman, who fished the river near his home because it was full of many different sorts of fish: each fish he caught, whether it was trout or pike or carp or chub, he carefully unhooked, wished a good day to, and set back in the water whence it came. The fish respected him for this, even though they didn't like being caught, and he became known as a reasonable person amongst the river creatures.

But none of them guessed that this kindly, thoughtful man had a secret desire: and that desire was to catch a salmon. It was strange but true: all the years the man had fished the river, he had never caught a salmon. Even though he could see them, leaping against the current, he had somehow never been able to catch one. He would lie awake at night, thinking about catching a salmon, and then he would fall asleep and dream of catching a salmon: but even in his dreams he never could.

Then one day, as the fisherman was thinking about packing up for the day - two bitterlings and a minnow - he felt a tug on the line. He reeled it in and saw with astonishment that he had caught a salmon. Gently he held it in his hand, gently he removed the hook - but instead of placing it back in the water, he continued to hold it.

“Whatever you intend to do to me,” said the salmon, “please stop the suspense and do it.”

“I mean you no harm,” the fisherman replied, “It's just that all my life I have dreamed of catching a salmon.”

“Well, now you have,” the salmon said, “so you can let me go.”

“I will as soon as I have asked you a question,” said the fisherman.

“A question?” repeated the salmon. “What sort of question?”

“It's like this,” the fisherman said. “Other fish live quiet, inactive lives. They spawn, they fertilise, they grow up, they swim around. But salmon - salmon are born in cold mountain streams, then swim to the ocean, and then, years later, return to the streams, swimming against the current, climbing higher and higher and overcoming incredible odds - all to accomplish something that no other fish feels the need to do.”

“And your question is?” asked the salmon.

“My question is this,” the fisherman replied. “Why?”

“It's simple,” said the salmon. “We're freelancers.”