

# *The Salmon's Tale*

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## *The Egg of Life*

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*Extracted from the upcoming book. Eggs for the Hunting, due out in early 2011. Tiptoes Lightly has gone to Running River where the fish spawn and this is a tale she hears an old salmon tell.*

**E**vening was falling on the river when the fingerlings gathered around the old salmon. Weeds swung from side to side and the setting sun stained the water rose-pink and gold.

“Please, please tell us a tale, O wise salmon,” begged the fingerlings, flicking their restless tails back and forth in the current. “Tell us about the wide world waiting for us.”

The old salmon rested on the river bottom and barely waved her tail. Now and then she gave a stronger thrust, full of grace and power.

“Young fingerlings! My little ones,” she scolded. “Settle down! Settle down!”—and the fingerlings found quieter waters, or swam close to the old salmon’s body and copied her strong movements.

“That’s better,” she said, when they had settled. “I shall tell you about the Egg of Life. The Egg of Life is small— and it is big. It does not always look like an egg—but it begins as an egg, and ends as an egg. In between, it turns itself inside out to the world, and then comes back to itself.”

“Tell! Tell!” bubbled the little fish. “We are so excited.”

The old salmon swished her tail understandingly and began to tell her story.

“Once,” she said, “there was an egg. It was stuck to a stone, underneath the waters of a river rushing to the sea. It was the size of a seed, ruby colored, as glistening and lucent as glass, and it had a dot inside. Oh, little fingerlings, the egg was small, but small in the world of the living is only the beginning of bigger, and this egg, this teeny tiny egg, was not at all small on the inside. It was huge and vaster than vast. All that had been was there, and all that was to come was there, and they both waited impatiently.

One day a tail appeared inside the egg, and inside the tail was a squiggle.

“Squiggle-squiggle,” squiggled the squiggle, and the tail whipped back and forth like lightning.

At the same time, two eyes appeared, and inside each eye was light looking for itself.

“I see! I see!” said the light in each eye, seeing itself for very the first time.

Between the eyes and the tail was a tummy. It was round and big. It didn’t seem to be doing much—but it was. It fed the eyes that looked at the world, and it fed the squiggle that wiggled the tail which turned the eyes every which way to see.

The eyes loved to see, and to see, and to see. They longed to see their watery world, and the tail squiggled to let them look wherever they wanted. They saw light wavering and washing through the waters; they saw the liquid sun shimmering golden across the sky; they saw the silvery stars dancing like fish across the dark heavenly night.

The tail grew, the eyes grew, and the tummy shrank. One day they burst from the egg. Out and about and away they swam, a fishling at last, happy to be free to explore the world. Every day the little fish waxed and grew. She explored the river, and the rocks, and the weeds, and the sandy banks, and overhanging trees and logs floating by. Everything fascinated her, even the logs that sped across the water and were chased by noisy roundabouts that went ‘brrrrmmmmmm’.

“We know those things! We know those things!” exclaimed the fingerlings. “We hear them all the time.”

“Yes, indeed. I bet you do,” said the wise old salmon, waving her tail. She waited for the fingerlings to settle down. Then she continued her story.

“One day the river seemed far too small for the fish.

“Where does all this flowing go?” the lovely round eyes asked the squiggle in the tail.

“Let’s see,” answered the squiggle merrily, and off they went with the flowing.

Bigger and broader the river became until it tasted briny.

“What’s this lovely soup?” asked the mouth, opening and closing in delight. “Who put all this salty seasoning into the water? It tastes so yummy!”

Out into the mighty ocean the little fish swam. She swam here, she swam there, she swam everywhere. She saw sharks, and dolphins, and sun fish and whales. She saw islands with trees and coconuts and flowers and butterflies. She saw sandy deserts under the waves, and mountains and chasms and forests of waving weeds. She saw gales and storms and peaceful nights, waves tall and long, and breakers pounding on rocky shores.

"My fingerlings," said the old wise salmon, "she saw all these things with her lovely eyes. And, O, how big she became! O, how strong her squiggle! And, O, how wise her eyes! She had turned into a mighty salmon that swam the seven seas."

"But, one day she longed for home. It called to her and sang to her and her squiggle knew where to swim. She found her river and swam upstream. She remembered the sweet taste of snow from the mountains, the sound of water rushing in the rapids, and the coolness inside the twisting current.

"O, dear fingerlings," said the wise old salmon, "she started growing quickly again after all these years. She became fatter and fuller and changed her shape.

"What is happening to me?" she asked her tummy.

"Eggs," her tummy replied. "We're full of eggs. We must find a place to lay them."

And that's what she did. She laid her eggs in nests along a stony stretch of riverbed where the water was shallow and the sunlight sparkled and played.

"I feel so tired," said her squiggle after she was done. "I can hardly wiggle any more."

"And my eyes grows dim," said her seeing. "The light is fading and night walks in the daytime."

Then her eyes saw the light for the last time, and her squiggle squiggled for the last time, and she was still—really, really still—for the very first time.

All along the riverbed bright red eggs were waiting—thousands and thousands of eggs with dark dots inside them. They waited impatiently, because each of them had a piece of the old salmon's squiggle just longing for a tail, and a lumen of light waiting to make eyes to see the world.

"And that," said the wise old salmon, "is the Egg of Life. It is round like an egg, it comes back to itself like an egg, and, if you'll excuse me, my young fingerlings, I have eggs in my tummy that are yearning to be laid," and off she swam with graceful strokes and was never seen again.