

## HOW SAMMY WENT TO CORAL-LAND

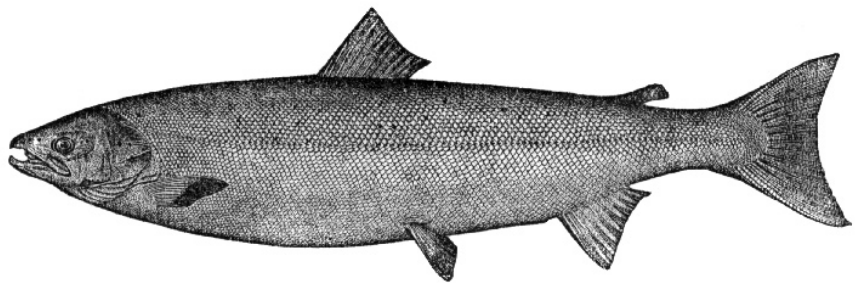
# Chapter 1: How Sammy Went Out To See the World

by Emily Paret Atwater

Once upon a time there lived in the depths of a deep, tranquil pool a young salmon, whom we will call “Sammy,” for short. He was a very handsome fish, and decidedly vain of his good looks. His flesh was a beautiful pink, and the scales that form the armor, or coat-of-mail of most fishes, were particularly handsome on Sammy, and glittered with many colors in the sunlight. He had a very graceful shape besides, and his fins were the envy of all the young fish of his acquaintance.

Almost all fishes have a great many fins, and although they differ sometimes in position and number according to the fish, the most important ones are the Dorsal fin, which stands straight up from the back, the Caudal fin, which is in the end of the tail, and the Pectoral fins, which are at the sides and take the place of feet in animals.


These fins all help to make the fish the splendid swimmers that they are, and are large and strong, or small and weak, according to which part of the water the fish inhabits. If he prefers



the surface of the ocean, or a large body of water, his fins must be large enough, and strong enough to battle against fierce waves, and strong tides, while the fish who lives far below where the water is more calm finds his weaker fins ample for his needs. The long, oval body which most fishes possess is another great help in gliding rapidly through the water.

Like others of his kind Sammy had a very strong spine in which was an air-bladder. By pressing the air out of this he could swim easily at a great depth, and by inflating it to let the air in, like a balloon, he could rise and swim along the surface.

Sammy's eyes were large and round, and he could see splendidly, especially when



the water was clear. His hearing, as well as his sense of smell was also good, and he breathed through the gills on each side of his throat. When taken out of the water the fish really dies of suffocation, for the water that enters its throat and flows out through the gills is the air that keeps it alive.

Sammy's maiden aunt, an old fish who lived in the same stream with him, used to tell strange tales of fish that can live several days out of water by reason of the different formation of their gills.

One of these is a tropical fish called the Anabas. It has very strong Pectoral fins which it uses like feet when on land, and it will even climb trees to catch the insects which it eats.


Another fish of this sort is the Frog-Fish, a hideous creature which is caught near Asia. It can crawl about a room, if shut up in one, and looks exactly like an ugly frog.

But the most wonderful of all is a South American fish called the Hassar. It usually lives in pools of water inland, and if the pool where it is happens to dry up, it will travel a whole night over land in search of a new home. It is an experienced traveler, and is said to supply itself with water for its journey. If the Hassar finds all the pools and streams dried up, it will bury itself in the sand, and fall into a kind of stupor until the rainy season comes around and brings it back to life.

"Aunt Sheen," so called from the beauty of her skin, used to tell Sammy another story about this famous fish. It seems that the Hassar builds a nest just like a bird, only hers is under water along the reeds and rushes of some shore. The nest is made of vegetable fibers, and is shaped like a hollow ball, flat at the top. From a hole in this ball the mother can pass in and out, and she watches over her nest with the most tender care, until the young ones leave it.

Fishermen catch the Hassar by holding a basket in front of the nest and beating it with sticks. When the poor mother comes out to defend her family, she falls into the basket and is captured.

"And serves her right, too," Aunt Sheen always concluded. "Building a nest and watching over it is a silly thing for a sensible fish to do. No one ever thinks of such behavior except some miserable little fish called Sticklebacks, and a few other inferior kinds. Why couldn't she leave her spawn in a quiet place somewhere near the shore, and then let them hatch out and look after themselves? That's the way I was brought up."



Now, this speech may sound very unkind and even heartless, but leaving the young to look after themselves is the customary thing among fishes. And when you consider that one mother fish often has many hundreds of children, it is not to be wondered at that she finds it impossible to take care of such a very large family.

The deep sea fishes come to the shore in the breeding season, deposit their eggs, or spawn, in some convenient spot, sometimes in the seaweed, or in vegetable matter, sometimes in the sand, on rocks, or in little, secluded pools, and then they bother themselves no more about their offspring.

The salmon, and some other kinds of sea fish go up the rivers and streams inland to deposit their young. Salmon are very strong, and they can make tremendous leaps and shoot up rapids with great swiftness. Indeed, the salmon is one of the most rapid swimmers in the fish family, and it is said that one salmon could make a tour of the world in a few weeks.


Sammy was very proud of his family, as well he might be, for his maiden aunt was always telling stories of their relations and connections.

Aunt Sheen was a big fish, the oldest and largest, not only in her own pool, but in all the salmon stream. In her youth she had been a great traveler and seen many wonderful sights, and was regarded with awe and admiration by the younger fish. But she had grown fat and lazy with age, and was now content to spend the remainder of her days in this quiet stream which hid itself among the northern pines a good many miles from the sea.

It was a pleasant place, with deep, still pools here and there in the shade, nice, slippery mossy rocks to hide under, and sunlit shallows where the water rippled over the white pebbles, or leaped musically down a tiny waterfall.

Such merry times as Sammy and his companions had chasing each other up and down the stream, leaping the waterfall, jumping over the rocks, and playing hide-and-seek in the shallows. Then there was always the excitement of watching for the flies and different insects that hovered near, and which made delicious meals when caught. The young salmon used to boast of the flies they had captured, just as boys and men do of their luck in fishing.

But our hero soon grew tired of this quiet life. It seemed very stupid and humdrum when compared with Aunt Sheen's marvelous tales of the great ocean, and the strange sights and thrilling adventures that there awaited the voyager. He was



larger than his brothers and sisters, his sea-going instinct was strong within him, he longed for the wonders of the great, unknown world, and grew tired of Aunt Sheen's repeated warnings.

This old fish always professed to be entirely uninterested in the doings of her youthful relatives. It was a matter of creed with her. But in spite of this fact she was very fussy over the young fish, and gave them a great deal of what Sammy considered tiresome advice.

"There is safety in numbers," was her favorite saying. "When you want to go on a journey wait until your companions are ready, and go in a school. Dreadful things always happen to young fish if they start out by themselves, they get eaten by sharks, or caught by those awful two-legged monsters on land, and the devil-fish is always on the lookout for them."

"But," Sammy would protest, "you have always said that some of the most terrible experiences you ever had came when you were with a lot of others. That time you were nearly speared going up the rapids you were in a school, and when you were caught in the net and it broke—"

"It wouldn't have broken if there hadn't been a school of fish in it," interrupted his aunt, tartly. "That just proves what I say; the weight of so many made the hole, and so I escaped."


"The only time when I came near getting caught was once when I was alone and got a hook in my gills. My! it was terrible! I ought to have known better, but I was very hungry that morning, and when I saw that beautiful fly hanging over the water—"

But Sammy had heard this story many times before, and was tired of the conversation.

"I don't want to wait any longer for these lazy brothers and sisters of mine to get ready," he said crossly. "Besides, if I did go in a school, I might get speared, or caught so that the rest could get away, and that would not suit me a bit. I'd rather risk the flies."

"You are an impertinent young fish," said Aunt Sheen, and she retired under her favorite rock in a rage.

That night when everything was very still, and all the world seemed asleep, alone and unobserved Sammy swam quietly down stream and started alone on his wanderings.



It was a lovely moonlight night, and only the faint sighing of the wind in the pine-trees broke the silence.

On and on swam Sammy following the stream as it twisted and turned now in the shadow, now in the moonlight. Now it flowed along straight and smooth with scarcely a ripple, its banks sweet with dew-soaked wild flowers, and now it dashed against a huge rock which partly blocked its path, or glided swiftly over shallow rapids.

All night long Sammy kept on his way, and all the time he felt that he was gradually going down, down, down, as the stream crept towards the sea.

The next morning he found himself in a strange country. The little stream down which he had been traveling had become a river. There were houses here and there on the shores, cultivated fields and pasture-lands, and in some places cattle browsed on the banks, or stood knee-deep in the water.

The strange sights and sounds filled Sammy with awe, and something like fear. He kept carefully in deep water and occasionally hid under a rock when he saw a big, strange fish approaching, for he knew that large fish often ate smaller ones.


Once in a while he stopped to ask a question of some brother salmon as to the right way to go, but the answer was always, "Follow the river and you can't go wrong," and follow the river he did.

When noon came he was fortunate enough to catch several fat flies, which made a delicious meal. Then he rested and dozed for a time in the shade of the bank, after which, feeling much refreshed, he started again on his journey.

For a day or so he traveled on, stopping only for a little rest and food, and getting more and more eager and excited all the time as he neared his destination.

Once the journey came near having an untimely ending for, unheeding Aunt Sheen's caution as to strange flies, he leaped eagerly at a particularly beautiful one poised over his head. Fortunately for our hero a strong puff of wind blew the fly aside at that moment, but not before the cruel hook which was concealed in it had grazed his tender mouth.

A good deal scared by his adventure, and feeling much less self-confident, Sammy swam away, resolved to avoid all suspicious insects in the future. He had several other narrow escapes at this stage of his journey, but they are not important enough to mention here.



But always as he journeyed on the river grew wider and wider, deeper and deeper. Strange dark shapes passed over his head, strange fish swam past him, the banks seemed very far away, and the currents were strong and hard to swim against.

For quite a while there had been a new and delightfully salt taste and smell to the water, it became stronger and stronger as he went on; then there was a roar of breakers along the shores, and the swift tide swept Sammy away from the river's mouth, and out into the vast ocean.