

fish

A school of fish were discussing their life in the ocean. Flying fish, they were, so when gliding through the air they could see the land and the tops of the mountains. It seemed exciting, and as they swam they exchanged ideas about how to get there. They swam towards the shore in order to learn more, and on the way they passed a pipe which was spewing shitty poison into the water. They half-closed their gills and swam on through it. "Perhaps the whole ocean will be like that one day" said one fish "and we will need somewhere else to live." Another fish told how from one of her glides she had seen clear blue lakes on the land, fed by sparkling streams from the mountains. Another reason to explore the land, they all said. It will not only be interesting and fun but will ensure that there are fish forever.

They swam towards the shore, constantly debating as schools of thinkers do. The nearest shore was rocky and unsuitable for hauling themselves out, but one of their sharper minds pointed out that the rocks were wreathed in seaweed, which would be good for holding the water that they were going to need. So they tore off strips of seaweed which they wrapped around themselves while swimming to a sandy beach in a nearby bay. Then with great effort they struggled past the shoreline. Their vertical tails were useless even when they were in the shallows, and their thin flying fish fins would not support their weight on land. Waves threw many of them onto the beach and there they flopped, surviving as long as their seaweed wraps kept water on their gills. One by one they perished.

Just one fish survived longer than the others. Sustained by her vision while gliding from wave to wave, of distant clear sparkling water, she flopped onwards and by chance rolled down a little slope into a stream. She swam up the stream, which was no harder than fighting against a

tidal current, with a burning sensation in her skin and gills. The stream ended in a little lake, and finding that there were insects there that she could eat, she paused to recover her strength. The burning sensation became stronger, and unbearable, and she noticed a difference in the water. It tasted strange, without the salty tang that she had always known without any sense that it was always there. After half an hour something went wrong with her swim bladder, and she could no longer keep her belly from rising to the surface. She remained like that for another few minutes until she too died.

A salamander looked down into the pool. He could remember when he was newly hatched and could swim. Now he had lost his gills and dared not enter the water again. The fish seemed such an ungainly specialized creature, so unsuited for life as he knew it. That tall tail and those thin fins, though; they did stir something like an ancient memory. They would be just the thing if you were in the sea leaping from wave to wave. But the sea was so far away and it seemed such a long journey.