

The Singing Fish

Lillian Vernon Farr



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The legend of the "Singing Fish" was told to me when I was seven by my foster grandfather, and embellished beautifully by my creative mother, Ethel Joslin Vernon, who retold it to me several times so that I would never forget it.

Hundreds of years ago, and perhaps before the Summer Indians had been named Washo, a small group of Indians, probably interrelated, came each summer to fish for the native trout.

South of Meeks Bay and close to Rubicon Point the huge boulders are piled high, and possess deep crevices and caverns and quiet waters for the trout.

On one of these lovely summers there came an Indian family to camp at Meeks Bay. Of this family was Little Brown Bear and his older brother Eagle Feather. Eagle Feather was well known among his people for being the most clever and successful fisherman, one who always came to camp with the largest catch of trout and, because of his age and ego, taunted his little brother and made fun of the one and only fish that Little Bear would catch.

After one of these embarrassing failures, Little Bear decided to go out onto the rocky point of land where the older men dropped their lines, a spot very dangerous for a little boy to go alone. He climbed out on the boulders and sat with his bone-hook baited with a handsome green beetle and carefully said his little prayer to the great God of Tahoe's blue waters, asking for just one fish, one so big that its belly would hold all the fish from Eagle Feather's last catch.

As he dropped his line up and down between the great rocks, there was a sudden opening of the waters, a tremendous splashing and then the body of a huge fish sparkled in the late afternoon sunlight.

Little Bear had never seen in all his seven years a fish so beautiful! It even surpassed the rainbow trout with its blue and green spots. This fish was mottled in sunset pink and dawn's golden apricot, with spots of cobalt blue and lime green.

In and out of the water the fish jumped and played, and Little Bear saw his chance to catch a fish so great that his whole tribe would look upon him as a greater fisherman than his brother.

Little Bear, knowing that he could not hook this tremendous creature, leaped into the water and grabbed the openings of the gills. The great fish slashed about for seconds and finally came to the surface and lay still in the arms of Little Bear.

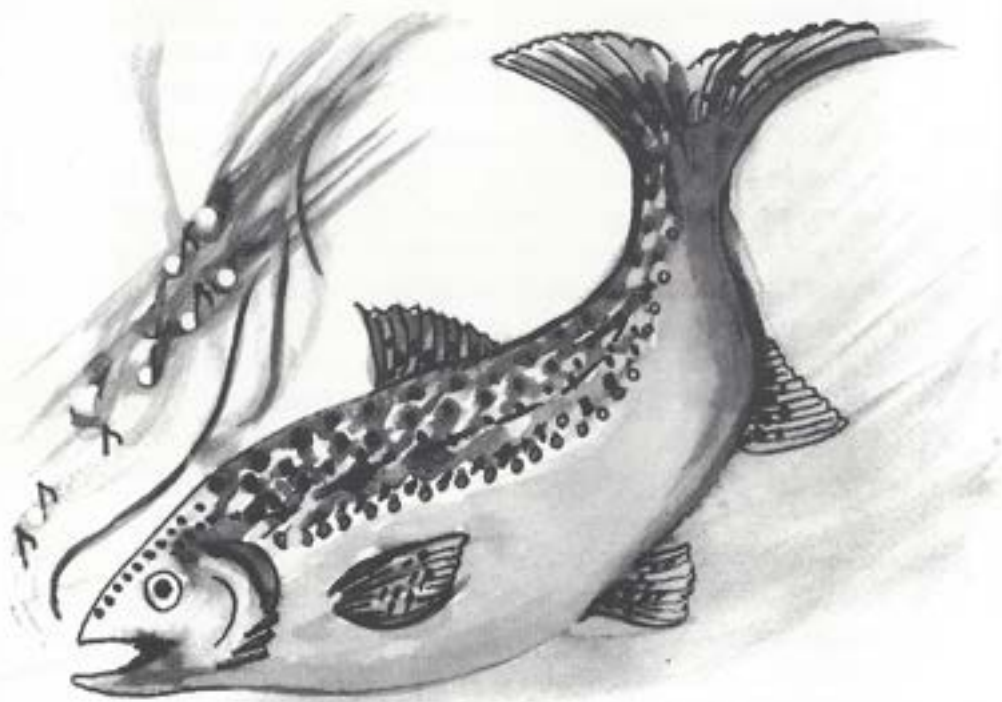
Suddenly a remarkable thing happened. The fish cried out in the Indian language, "Little Bear, turn me loose and I will do something for you that none other has ever experienced, and you can become famous to your brother and all your people. If you let me go, I will sing for you and you can come every summer at this time, just before sunset, and call me and command me to sing. You may bring your family and they will believe that you are much greater than your brother and that God has given you the power of miracles.

Little Bear let go of the great fish and climbed back upon the big rock. The fish splashed happily in and out of the darkening water, and, as the sun was setting behind the mountains of Meeks Bay, Little Bear heard the most beautiful singing, filled with ripples, splashes and bubbles. He then hurried back to the camp to tell of this miracle.

The last day of August, or perhaps in September, Little Bear took his family and his taunting and disbelieving brother to the great rocks near Rubicon. As they sat in the last rays of the sun, Little Bear called out, "Come up great fish and sing for me as you promised." There was a long pause and then out of the deep water splashed the most beautiful fish of pink, apricot, gold and green, and then it dropped into the deep cavern of the rocks. A moment passed, suddenly a lovely song of incomprehensible ripples and bubbles drifted out of the depths . . . and the brother Eagle Feather was awed into admitting that his little brother had magic powers far greater than his fishing skills.

FOOTNOTE:

Being an imaginative child, I climbed out on the magic boulders at sunset and really put in listening time, knowing that I too would see the Singing Fish and hear the song. Until I was nine years old, I went faithfully and sat on innumerable big rocks around the Bay of Meeks. At one time I heard ripples and bubbles, but never did I see the huge, magic fish. So goes any story with a Little Brown Bear! As legend and science will have a "truth," Bears and Eagles find fishing very easy and profitable, and every legend does have an underlying truth upon which the story has its birth.



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