



A New Native Story by Tish McFadden

Cultural • Environmental • Bilingual • Educational

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UPRIVER TO MORNING

A Journey to Wisdom

Chapter One: Salmon's Quest Begins

By Tish McFadden ©2019

Synopsis

A ribbon of water, known as Rogue River, winds her way through southwest Oregon just as she has done for thousands and thousands of years. She splashes over rocks and waterfalls, carves deep gorges, and rolls across wide, green valleys, never sleeping once. This waterway is Salmon's path upriver to meet his teacher, Morning Star, who rises at dawn in the skies above Boundary Springs, many swims away. Salmon is on a journey to learn all that he must know.

On the eve of Salmon's departure, Coyote celebrates his friend's big swim by building a campfire on the beach. As night falls, Coyote proudly coaches Salmon on the power of stories and stars: that they are here to remind us of where we've been, and where we're going.

Come sunrise, from seaside rocks at the mouth of Rogue River, Eel plays music through seven sound holes in her flute-like body. Her gift of music gives Salmon strength and courage for his long journey. After saying good-bye to his friends on shore, and thanking the Great Salt Sea for being his home, Salmon turns his attention toward fresh water. With a swish of his tail, he's off!

Upriver, Grandmother and Grandfather Cedar announce that Salmon is swimming. Their words are carried on the outstretched wings of Red-Tailed Hawk.

Salmon's quest begins!

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Chapter Two: In Six Directions

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Synopsis

Red-Tailed Hawk screeches the news, “Salmon is traveling toward his teacher, Morning Star, and I am going with him.” Salmon feels protected under the watchful eyes of his guardian hawk. “Thank you, my flying friend,” says Salmon. “One day I’ll return the favor!”

Not to be left behind on this adventure, Coyote tracks Salmon’s progress from a woodland trail along the river’s edge. With his eyes fixed on Salmon, Coyote stubs his toe on an unseen rock in his path. “Yeow,” he cries! His outburst alerts Deer Woman who is quietly feeding nearby. She recognizes the cries of Coyote. As she comes to his aid, the two hear screaming calls of alarm from Red-Tailed Hawk, flying overhead. Salmon hears it too.

“I wonder what she sees in the sky. What is she alerting us to?” Salmon twists through the current. “I know that tremble!” BOOM!!! Thunder roars. In an instant, the thrashing rain of a late summer storm assails the landscape, soaking everyone and everything in it. Pounding wind whips Rogue River into a frothy serpent, with pulsing currents that quickly drain Salmon’s energy. He struggles to find a place to rest, but instead, without warning or witness, Salmon disappears.

Red-Tailed Hawk notices immediately. She swoops toward the river where she last saw him. Her eyes scan underwater through a curtain of floating debris and whitecaps, seeking any sign of Salmon’s swishing tail or silver scales. Rain falls hard and fast off her folded feathers. Though utterly spent, her sharp eyes fix on one mission only.

Finding Salmon!

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Chapter Three: Circle Five Times

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While Coyote and Deer Woman wait out the storm in the hollow of a dry cave, a racing river bullies Salmon. He thrashes his tail against thick water just to stay in place. River Hawk, the masked fisherman, secretly observes Salmon's distress from above. In an instant, he leaps off his lofty perch and dives toward the river. With talons outstretched, River Hawk snatches Salmon, careful to protect his fragile, silvery scales.

River Hawk is an osprey. He normally delights in eating fresh fish from the river. But not today. Instead, he rescues Salmon from the raging waters by lifting him up in his talons and flying to safety in a protected pool high in the cliffs.

To help pass long hours in the cave, Deer Woman tells Coyote the story of the Daldal Brothers, the giant dragonfly who splits himself into two halves, one elder and one younger, who disagree about everything. We learn through their actions and ongoing arguments, that opposites actually bring balance to the world.

When evening falls, stars reappear in the sky as the storm moves on. As promised, the next morning River Hawk returns Salmon to his watery home to continue his important journey upriver to Morning Star. On the move again, Salmon and his friends soak in the colorful and tasty bounty of River's autumn valley. Food in rich, delicious variety is everywhere.

The Daldal Brothers enter the story as two dragonflies. After much arguing, they transform themselves into Upper and Lower Table Rocks, where the band of loyal though weary travelers will overwinter.

All is well until the shelter is built, the fire is lit, and the old stories are ready to be retold ... like whitecaps on a roaring river, the ground suddenly pitches this way and that. The Daldal Brothers are bickering again. In an instant, crumbling cliffs, rumbling rocks, and quarreling brothers drown out the musical voice of Rock Old Woman.

She is singing her medicine song to save the world.

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Chapter Four: The Great Animal

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Synopsis

Table Rocks jump and rattle, upsetting trees, cliffs, and the slumbering night. Rock Old Woman sings her medicine song as walls of the freshly finished shelter creak and bend. Fearing a collapse, Coyote and Deer Woman roll and race to get outside. Jackrabbit, Fox, and Muskrat sprint after them. Red-Tailed Hawk's storytelling ladder splinters as the fire chokes under falling dirt and debris.

Star People peer through billowing dust. They blink knowingly. They have watched the Daldal Brothers quake and shake before. As the travelers bounce about on the Ribs of the Great Animal that is the World, Red-Tailed Hawk dives toward the river to find Salmon and his relations safe in an underwater hollow.

Rock Old Woman beats her drum, gradually slowing its tempo in order to still the quaking earth beneath her feet. When the last rock is hurled off the roof of the world, and settles, all is still. Without warning, the exhausted Daldal Brothers simply stop moving. Early the next day, the travelers continue their journey to Morning Star, up, Up UP the river to her source. In an unusual display of brotherly love, the Daldal Brothers agree to remain awhile, side-by-side, along the riverbank.

Bear circles his fire turning the season from winter to spring, something he has done since the beginning. Sounds of spring instantly saturate the world, and the earth is reborn.

The travelers look to Hawk to set the pace.

At sundown, Salmon and his friends gather for the night at Avenue of Giant Boulders. The constellation, Big Bear, rises in the eastern sky to continue his circle dance around the North Star. Sky Bear joins Earth Bear to bring longer days and greater warmth to higher elevations.

Nearby, Red-Tailed Hawk, the Winged Watcher, tucks a turned head into her fluffed wing feathers, and closes her eyes.

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Chapter Five: Stories and Stars

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Just before sunrise, as her sky neighbors take their leave, Morning Star rises above the eastern horizon. Her shimmer draws the attention of Rock People, Animal People, Tree People, Water People, and for the first time, Salmon. Though he cannot yet see her, he knows she is close.

Salmon takes this moment to honor the efforts and sacrifices of his companions. Through storms, dueling Dragonflies, earthquakes, fires, and floods, they stayed by his side. Salmon shows gratitude by nudging stones into a tiny rock stack, five stones high. The number five is sacred to the Takelma people.

Spring brings rainbow colors to these higher elevations. Scarlet poppies zigzag through fields of purple lupine, a sight so magnificent that Jackrabbit can't help himself. At full speed, he bounds through painted meadows, hoping Red-Tailed Hawk doesn't notice. Every traveler feels energized by the nearness of Boundary Springs and the soon-ness of meeting Morning Star.

With one last mountain ridge to cross, the travelers learn about the value of fire from the One-Leggeds. They rejoice upon seeing ripe wild huckleberries. And when they finally arrive at Boundary Springs, they sleep.

On this final night of their long trek, Coyote enters the dreams of every traveler. "Dreams," coached Red-Tailed Hawk early on, "help us remember those valuable bits of wisdom we collect on journeys."

In the morning, dog-tired and irritable, the travelers wake up cloaked in fog. The morning mist is so thick they can't see their own paws, hooves, talons, feet, or fins in front of them. When the fog lifts, Morning Star speaks.

Far downriver to the sea, sweet and salty notes rise on the wind. The music is coming from Eel's flute-like body. She plays her song to Salmon, Coyote, Red-Tailed Hawk, Deer Woman, Jackrabbit, and Bear.

Star People peek over the ocean, and dance!