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# THE SMART PERCHLET



B.V. Kolmakov



**Boris Kolmakov, the author**

“A fairy tale lives in  
every child, it is  
only to be

# The Smart Perchlet

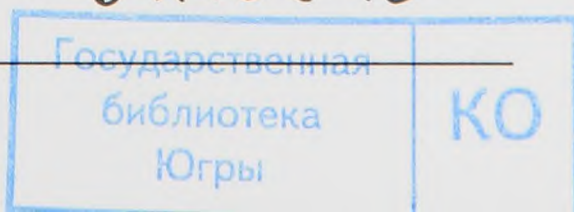
The ecological tale about courage and  
responsibility

By B.V. Kolmakov

Translated by L.N. Dudanova

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especially M.A. Stepanova and L.N. Dudanova, for the help  
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**Boris Viktorovich Kolmakov** was born on 30 April in 1955 in the village Korliki, Nizhnevartovsky district, where he still live surrounded by the enchanting and peaceful Siberian nature because the village Korliki is a secluded spot – the only way to get to Korliki is a helicopter.

In 1972 Boris Kolmakov graduated middle school in the village Laryak. In 1973 he was drafted for 3-year service. He was the best soldier in his unit. In 1977 Boris Kolmakov graduated the technical school where he studied organization of hunting and fur-farming. He had an interesting job experience: he was a wildlife manager and a section foreman and a hunting industry manager.

In 1982 he entered Kiev Institute of Civil Aviation. He had been working as an airport manager for 25 years in his home village where still the only air track exists to this day. Boris Kolmkov can speak such rare languages as Khanty and Eskaleut. His knowledge about the exotic Siberian culture is more than that: he can also drive a reindeer team. He loves the Russian nature with all his heart and he would love to take part in saving its wildlife, that's why he began writing his tales. It took him only a night to write his first book "The Goose king", others took him 2-3 days. He keeps saying that fairy tales "sleep" in every child since his or her childhood, they simply need to be woken. Boris Kolmakov's tales often describe

a “parallel” world around us: it’s pets like parrots, fish, hedgehogs, tortoises and many others. Today the tale-teller travels around Russia to meet his young readers: from Kaliningrad to Kamchatka Peninsula, from Ukraine to Vladivostok, from North Caucasus to Volga Region. Boris Kolmakov always interests children with his tales making them feel the whole emotional palette. Then he comes back home, his calm and quiet forest corner, to write new books.

The tale “The Goose king” was written by Boris Kolmakov, who is a native in the village Korliki, Nizhnevartovsky district. He has got a nice ear for “the singing of birds and the breath of herbs”. His book is based on his long experience of observing the wildlife. The purpose of this tale is to show a right way of the world perception: a man can understand himself only when learn the laws of nature. Kolmakov describes the spiritual path as the search for harmony with nature. For Kolmakov ecology is concerned with a soul first of all. All these facts made Nizhnevartovsk State University (NVSU) support the publishing of the tale for ecology education in the context of the VI International Ecological Action “To Save and Preserve”.

The story is interesting and useful to different people who are not indifferent to the environment problems.

## From the author

For many years I have gone ice fishing. To prevent the fish from choking, I have to make 10-15 air holes every 2-3 days. At that time of year, the ice can be 40-50 centimetres thick. You should make a hole in the ice with an ice chisel and then clean the hole from ice fragments with a spade. When you punch through the ice, a fountain of water a meter high will rise above the frozen river, as the ice forces oxygen up through the hole and to the surface. The thought comes to mind: everybody needs oxygen to live, and the hole I make give oxygen to hundreds thousand fish.

Watching the behavior of fish helps you to understand the underwater world better. This world is pretty similar to ours. If trouble occurs, an ecocatastrophe, this unites both worlds. A shallow lake in Africa is a good example of this - lions, antelopes, jackals and zebras come here to quench their thirst. They drink together. The beasts of prey dare not hurt their herbivorous victims.

Fish travel thousands of kilometres through the water to spawn, before coming back home to winter. People do the same – first they hurry abroad for a holiday at the seashore, where they realise how much better their home is, and so they hurry back home again. The stripes on a perch's back are quite similar to our life: a white stripe, a black one,

a stripe of good luck, a stripe of tough times that surely will end.

From this book you will learn about the immense geography of Russian, you will travel to meet predatory fish and discover that they are in fact as you and I. You will experience what an environmental accident is like. Oilmen should know that even very small lakes and rivulets are connected to each other and to the underground waterways like tiny capillaries, and all this water flows to the nearby marshes. Very often, the harm and damage to the natural environment is irreversible. When people realise they are not the majesties of Earth, but only guests on our planet, it will be a time of blooming and happy life and the ecological situation will be improved.



## The Smart Perchlet

In the middle of the endless ocean of the taiga, a little rivulet is swirling around. In winter it scarcely ices over even when it is severely cold. Ground water replenishes it with a current, carrying that most important thing – oxygen. Without it, all the fish of the river will die. Such rivulets are winter homes for brotherhoods of fish. The winter time they call night. If there are broad-leaved trees along the river banks - like birches, aspens, rowans – here is no place for fish to sleep, because the whirligig leaves fallen to the river will rot during the long midnight, filling the water with carbon dioxide. In big rivers, sealed tightly with ice, there is no oxygen at all and so there is no life at all. But the rivulets which we have mentioned are a paradise for schools of fish.

## Chapter 1. Bub The Burbot

The strange, cold, deep woke Perchlet. Such a din even made his head ache. He made several morning movements, a sort of gymnastics exercise, and said: “No, it’s not beastly cold, it’s fishly cold.” Here, under deep water, in the pit, it was dark. Every minute Perchlet became more and more abrupt and energetic. Finally, he realised that he was alone. He began calling out: “Hey, fishes, where are you?” He begged for an answer, but there was none, only an awful, heavy silence. He swam away because he was hungry and there was no food around. He was swimming and calling out louder and louder when suddenly he heard a lumbering voice: “Stop shouting, I am here.” Perchlet said to the dark: “Who are you?” but no answer came. Underneath he saw an enormous, dark monster with small round eyes and a white moustache.

“Who are you?” asked Perchlet again.

“Bub. Why are you raising a cry here? Rub your eyes and switch on your computer.” Needless to say, our little Perchlet really had got a PC – he was a modern perch.

Perchlet addressed his companion respectfully:

- Bub the Burbot, could you tell me, please, if there are any other fishes around?

- No-o-o, drawling the word, answered Bub the Burbot. He moved closer to Perchlet to add:

- Your friends swam down the river a month ago and still haven't come back. All the winter night something was rumbling, that even made my head ache.

- Mine too.

- Well, people seem to be doing something up there.

- What are they doing up there?

- I don't know yet, but I believe something bad is going on. It's time for fishes to swim up to

the Celestial Lake to spawn. Now there's no one here to be seen, your brothers have yet to return. As if something bad has happened, said Bub, and fell silent.

Sore Perchlet made two circles and switched on his PC. On his computer screen a map of the underwater kingdom appeared. Also on the screen was an arrow, indicating Perchlet's location. The arrow also showed where he shove swim this season. He was supposed to head towards the lake called Celestial. From this lake, streamlets stretched to the four corners of the world. Moreover, on the screen Perchlet could see the water temperature, the depth and the pressure. Suddenly, in the section "Pressure" a caution pop-up appeared: "Don't surface fast! Surface clockwise from the pit during the day and reach ten-twenty centimetres level to stabilise the pressure." "Oh my, thought Perchlet, how serious it is! What a computer!" Then the computer helped

Perchlet to measure his body temperature and Perchlet began to swim up from the pit little by little, from where he had spent the long winter night.

## **Chapter 2. Alba the Albatross**

While our friend Perchlet is swimming up from the depths, we will tell you his story. Our Perchlet is only a year old. He was born here, in this lake, between high grasses swaying rhythmically on the waves. Perchlet was a great sleeper, so when his brothers left him alone to spawn, in his sleep Perchlet heard them teasing: “Sleepyfish, sleepyfish, sleepyfish...”. Perhaps this passion for sleeping saved the life of our hero? Yes, hero, that’s exactly how he will be called after all the feats you are soon to read about. Until then...

Meanwhile Alba the Albatross was flying round above a fast rivulet in search of straggling, absent-minded baby fishes. They are his food.

Today he was unlucky, there were no fish. The bird began to fly higher and higher ascending in a circular motion. From here he could see a derrick located downstream. A diesel engine was droning wearily, a winch is working, a rotor is whirling. A bit further downstream the Albatross spotted some black liquid, spreading slowly across the water's surface. "What is it? Maybe an accident?" thought Alba. Several gulls had landed in the sticky mush of black slush, while little river crayfish were drifting blurred among the oil slick. It is impossible to rescue them. And further there are dead fishes. Now no one needs them: neither people nor gulls, nor the Albatross. Circling above the oil derrick, Alba headed to a lake located upstream. Even though he is the main enemy of small fishes (because he feeds on them), he wishes he could land on the water, dive down deep and spread the terrible news to the underwater citizens, to warn

them not to swim downstream into the already lifeless river. He did his best and flew away.

### **Chapter 3. Uncle Perch**

Dear reader, it's time for us to return to the underwater kingdom. Perchlet had already surfaced and taken a deep breath of fresh air. He was having fun. The weather was sunny, the banks of the lake were still covered with snow and the water was warm (for him at least). He swam in the right direction. He had fun hiding under every snag to frighten the ducks swimming around him. "This is so great!" thought Perchlet, but something was different, he wondered what was missing.

There were fish missing. Close on his right a huge fish passed by. There was clear evidence that it was a big perch but for some reason his body was an eerie black and glittering, and moreover a strange unpleasant stench came from the perch. Perchlet swam closer to the huge fish and asked:

“Who are you and where are you from?” The big perch turned to Perchlet and said:

- Listen up, Lil’Perchie, don’t ask silly questions. I’m your uncle. Swim promptly to the lake and prepare a hot bath for me. Tell everyone that trouble came to our river.

- Got it, said Perchlet, don’t worry, Uncle Perch, I’ll be there in a jiffy.

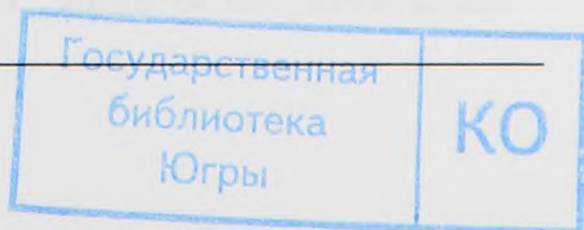
Perchlet set off resolutely with a jerk of his tail. His head was full of questions: “What is a hot bath? Why did Uncle Perch call him Lil’Perchie and Bub the Burbot call him Perchlet?” and many other questions. On the way he met little fishes and Perchlet repeated over and over again: “A black perch is coming. He ordered a hot bath. He said that trouble has come.”

Many fishes followed him.



## Chapter 4. Alone against two sharp-toothed pikes

He hadn't gone far up the lake, when suddenly two sharp-toothed pikes dashed towards him. Perchlet began to rush about from side to side and finally hid crudely under a snag. But the pikes kept up with him. "That's it, sadly thought Perchlet, I won't become a big perch, I haven't even done anything good and kind in my short life. It seems I have to say so long to this bright world." He had a look at his computer: the lake was really close to him, but if he were to swim out, he would be clearly visible and it would be foolish to hide behind the algae – they would find him anyway. And again he made a request to the computer, but now he was looking for lines of retreat from the predators. When he had located his route, he swam off with a jerk from the snag. At a crazy speed (or so he thought), Perchlet rushed from one snag to



the next, hiding under another and another and darting out again. The pikes were still on his tail. After a vertical jerk to the surface, Perchlet suddenly spun away and downwards. The pikes couldn't predict such a pirouette – they had never seen anything like this. It was difficult to make out in the multitude of bubbles where the catch was. The predators stopped. The little hero, grown bolder, hit the impudent pikes' muzzles with his fin and shouted:

- Shut up your toothy jaws! Trouble is coming and it is your business too! In such a tough time you think only about how to stuff your bellies with us fishes. Maybe in a half an hour you will die. Uncle Perch said to prepare a hot bath for him and also asked to gather you, fools, all together. He wants to tell us something important about the trouble that may befall us.

His words made the pikes close their mouths and even stand aside. Passing by these formidable

river dwellers, Perchlet felt a chill that reminded him the chill he had felt in the pit depths. Everything ended safely, and soon he was heading towards the lake.

## **Chapter 5. Greed ruins everyone**

Perchlet swam on the left side of the lake making a big circle. On his way he met schools of perches, roaches, syroks and even Auntie Nelma. He cried out to everyone about the hot bath, old Perch and the gathering because of the emergency situation.

The river was still ice-bound, but the ice was already transparent and clear giving the impression that it consisted of thousands of icicles. Here and there its weight made the ice crumble and break up. The beams of sun sparkled through the ice crust and it seemed to Perchlet that he was in a fairy castle. It was incredibly beautiful. Suddenly the ice crackled and through the thickness of ice something long

and curved entered the water. At the same time, in other places the same things appeared. Perchlet thought fast and looked at the screen of his computer to see a new word: “ice axe”. “Danger” flashed in Perchlet’s mind when in the water spoon lures suddenly appeared with earthworms. The little Perchlet hadn’t had breakfast yet so the worms made him lick his lips. There and then he noticed his fellows catching the spoon lures and disappearing up through the air holes. Our hero was at the crossroads. “There’s danger everywhere, thought Perchlet, how to stop the fishes?” He had no idea. He began screaming, but no one listened to him, his warnings were useless. Perchlet thought it was easier with the pikes for some reason. These schools hungered for worms and nothing could stop them. There were less and less fishes, and the spoon lures were glittering attractively, the worms were wriggling in a most appetising way and so our Perchlet yielded to temptation and... caught a

spoon lure crudely with his lips... Perhaps his clumsiness was his rescue. No sooner had his head appeared above the surface, when he found himself on a heap of other fish. “What a nimble perch,” he heard a fisherman say. Lying there, he saw men sitting around. They were smoking and talking loudly. One of them said:

- This perchie is small. Maybe it's worth setting him free to grow?

- Nah, save it for the cats.

Lying on his side, Perchlet looked around and saw an oil derrick far away rising above the forest. “That’s the thing that droned all night long and made Bub the Burbot’s head ache. This derrick spilled the oil into the water, and these men are oil workers and they came here to catch and eat us,” thought Perchlet. The fishes around were screaming and crying loudly, but people had no idea why the caught fishes were opening and closing their mouths. The fishes screamed: “Help! Help!” People

can never hear their voices. “That’s it, the end. I’m again on the verge of death. Now I’m almost a meal, I’m fish soup,” said Perchlet to himself. Such thoughts made him feel sorry. He bent and jumped and dived in the air hole. Perchlet dashed fast to the bottom of the lake. Coming to a stop, the tot shuddered and breathed with relief: “What happiness, my curiosity ended safely!” Now he knew the value of life and he was ready to warn everyfish against spoon lures.

## **Chapter 6. A penny for good luck**

Perchlet circled over and over looking for fishes, but failed. The spoon lures vanished, and in one air hole a penny sank. It was one kopek. Its bright glitter and glare made Perchlet want to swallow it, and he did!. We know, dear reader, that the fishermen threw the penny for good luck, but this “good luck” got into our little hero’s stomach giving fortune to Perchie.

Meanwhile, the fishermen cast off the worms from their hooks and threw them into the holes, so our smart Perchlet could eat in peace. He wasn't in a hurry even though he had a job to gather his fellows at the place old Perch had pointed out. Using his computer Perchlet learnt that he was a half-way there. Within seconds he heard the ice cracking.

Do you know, my dear reader, what greed is? Greed ruins everyone: people, animals and fish. That day one of the fishermen caught too many fishes and crossed the lake with an overfull corf<sup>1</sup> and unexpectedly went through the ice. That sound was what our hero heard. Perchlet saw the fisherman's body in the water, his head was still above the surface. With one hand he held on to the ice, and with the other one he still held the corf full of live fishes. Perchlet grasped at the net and began

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<sup>1</sup> a basket for caught fishes.

to pull it back. Big fishes in the corf realized what he was trying to do, but couldn't help him. However, being in the lake again, they swallowed and inhaled their native lake water. Perchlet tried to call for help, but his cries could not be heard. Then the fishes in the corf decided to help him and started to shout loudly. Hearing their cries, schools of young pikes gathered around. They grabbed hold of the corf and tugged it out of the fisherman's hands. Sinking to the lake bed, the corf became undone and fishes were set free. Among the rescued fishes there were some pikes. Perchlet thought to himself that trouble united not just friends, but enemies also. Everyfish looked at the little perchie, realising that they could have died if it wasn't for him. They thanked the hero sincerely, and since this very moment he was called Perch the Braveheart.

Now, Perchlet did not swim, but flew, inspired and telling all the fishes that he met about the trouble to come and the meeting arranged by



Uncle Perch. He swam and shouted, and everyfish listened to him. Meanwhile it was sunset, the day was almost over.

## **Chapter 7. The hot bath**

The old perch swam to the sandbank from the south side of the lake. There was no ice, and the water at the edges was slightly warm. All the fishes gathered around began rubbing him off silently with sand. They cleaned his sides, tail and fins. He was silent while everyfish was washing and rubbing him down. This was his hot bath. The way was cleared for our hero to approach the old perch. After waiting for a pause, Perchlet said:

- There is oil got in our river. I was saved from this nightmare by a miracle. Thousands and millions of our brothers and sisters have died. Those, who stayed downriver, don't know about the trouble. I have gathered you all here to try to find a way of warning the others, and to find a way of

getting back to our natal lake. There are four streams which flow from our home lake in all directions.

There was a long silence. It seemed complicated. Suddenly somefish said: “Here’s our hero-perchie! Maybe he can help us?” The old perch turned to Perchlet to say:

- Do you mean this one? I’m not sure he can help: he is too young.

The two pikes who had hunted Perchlet swam forward and said:

- We failed to eat him. He turned out a very nimble and smart little kid.

Everyfish: pikes, roaches, perches and syroks began speaking in one voice about their marvelous rescue thanks to Perchlet.

- I see, he really is an astute little kid, summed up the old Perch. - Well, can you perform a miracle again?

The hero paused, hesitating. He had no choice so he agreed.

While the fishes were talking to each other, Perchlet switched on his computer to see what he would have to face. He had to swim a thousand mile in about half a year, or one underwater day.

## **Chapter 8. Cosmos**

Our planet is small. All things are interrelated. People and animals, birds and fishes and even plants – all are interconnected. Looking from space, we cannot see country borders, but we can see continents, seas, rivers. This is Earth. Earth is our home. Even in this tale friends unite with enemies to solve the problems of man-made disasters and the preservation of the environment. The law is one and unwritten. It is eternal. Our hero Perchlet found himself in a difficult situation. The Celestial Lake is located between two great rivers of West and East Siberia. They are the Ob river

and the Yenisei river. Now, it is spring tide and our hero must enter the tributaries of the Yenisei river to swim up for more than a thousand kilometres. Of course, there are exciting adventures and new friends waiting for him on the way. Then he will swim along the ocean's edge, where the water isn't fresh but salty. And only a tiny upper layer of water, the result of ice melting, will give him a chance to swim. Everyone will be friendly to him. He will come to the mouth of the river Ob and swim against the current to the river Vakh. After this there will be fifteen hundred kilometres left. That's what our hero will do because he is Smart Perchlet.

At The Celestial Lake, dawn marked the beginning of the longest day, which fish call the Spring-Summer-Autumn Day.

## Chapter 9. Tusya and Dusya

For this long journey, Perchlet got two companions. They were the pike who had hunted him. One was named Dusya and another the other was named Tusya. They had just spawned and now they were absolutely free. They were supposed to conduct him to the Great Yenisei River where they had to find him to other pikes. At the beginning they swam like this: Dusya was at the head of the line, then our hero-perch swam behind, and at the rear came Tusya. Everything was great, but Perchlet often lagged behind so Dusya (she was older) offered for him to hang on her dorsal fin.

It was a genius idea. Perchlet liked it a lot. Schools of other fishes that Perchlet had never seen before were gleaming. All those fishes watched the escort without any questions. Speed and a free passage downstream were guaranteed. The travellers barely stopped to rest. The nights

were clear, the sun was always shining. Getting closer to the great and mighty river they could see new-leafed trees. The further they swam, the more white flowers they could see. The smell was indescribably protent not only above the river but even underneath the water. Along the way they discussed different things. In particular, Perchlet was interested in the word “spawn”, he didn’t know yet what it meant so he asked his fellow travellers. Before Dusya had a chance to answer, Tusya began to say heartily:

- Those pikes whose roe is matured swim to the sandbanks where the grass grows. Every future mother is accompanied by two cavaliers. They snuggle up as close as possible and she spawns. That is called “rubbing”. Only a week after the rubbing our babies come into the world. Unfortunately, they will never know their parents and will live by the river laws, which means they mustn’t gape lest they be eaten. You amazed us

very much that day. We were even about to swallow you, but at last minute your words paralyzed us as if a lightning bolt passed through us. Where did you learn it?

- Well, I believe I got it from my forefathers.

- If only you knew what young pikes say of you! You did your best after all to free those fishes from the corf. No one could have done it like you did. There was our granny in the corf. She promised to protect you from predators in gratitude until she dies. Their words pleased Perchlet and even made him feel proud of himself. And by now the Yenisei was near. In a pit that was the nearest one to the river mouth the pikes left Perchlet alone.

## **Chapter 10. Tay Myr and Angara**

It was not long before two huge pikes appeared near the pit and after them came Tusya and Dusya. One of the unacquainted pikes asked Tusya: "That's he, isn't it?" "Yes," was her answer.

The stranger interested in Perchlet was called Tay Myr.

- Never mind his size and his unlikeliness as a hero. He is really the one I've told you about, explained Tusya.

- Oh, all right, swim with us, now we are your escort to the ocean.

Perchlet said goodbye to Tusya and Dusya. Tay Myr took him in tow and shot ahead. Tay Myr and his friend were very big pikes. Their speed was extremely quick, even with the helpful current. The second pike's name was Angara. She also asked Perchlet to tell her about his adventures. She was amazed how such a small fishie could rescue about two hundred fishes, not everyfish is able to do that. Perchlet didn't swim, he flew. He looked at his computer to see that they were ahead of schedule: the distance he was supposed to overcome in three months, he had covered in just twenty days thanks to the pikes. Strangely, Perchlet didn't think about



himself at all, he thought only of his important and urgent task of informing the main school of the trouble and changing their route so it would be parallel to the river. That was the only way to save them.

The trevellers got to the river and decided to have a rest. The computer announced the name of their location - the Stony Tunguska river. Suddenly in a pit a predator appeared. He boldly dashed towards Perchlet. Perchlet started, but the pikes blocked his way and said something to the stranger. The predator tailed once. Perchlet spotted a small fin on the end of his tail, it meant that he was a noble fish. The stranger got closer to Perchlet to introduce himself: "I'm Taimen. Nice to meet you."

His face did not look kind. He looked rather like a bandit.

- Good afternoon, Perchlet greeted him, I've come to your parts for a very important affair. In my home, Western Siberia, oil is being extracted,

but we fishes, have no need for it. People produce it, in a word, they drill into the ground. Often there are accidents that occur and the oil spills into the river. Wait a while and maybe soon the drill men will come to you and you will know what this trouble means.

All the while, in the big pit a great number of different fishes gathered. Our hero continued:

-That it what I'm here about: I need to warn the main school and turn it to the parallel rivulet. Do you know what oil is?

The silence was an answer. Then somefish murmured hesitantly: "No".

- When we washed old Perch, all of our fishdom spent two hours cleaning him and saving his life.

Everyfish listened quietly to the small speaker. Taimen came closer, hugged Perchlet and said:

- Such heroes light up the whole underwater world! We wish you good luck and send our solidarity.

They swam downstream. Fresh leaves were already bursting from the trees. From below water, mountains could be seen to the right, and the left bank was low and covered in broad-leafed trees. A small boat was pulling rafts - many-metre long tied beams, on which sat people who steered them. "How interesting and exciting the world is," thought Perchlet. The water was clean so Perchlet could see a long way all around. "How kind the fishes are around here," noted Perchlet to himself. They were getting closer to a big city; here and there cutters were furrowing the water sheet, carrying something. "It's Dudinka town, said Tay Myr, futher is my fatherwater, three days more and we will reach the ocean."

## Chapter 11. The Arctic Ocean

Near the ocean, the mouth of the river Yenisei was completely covered in ice. Tay Myr warned:

- You are lucky, the edges have melted. Now, the seals are going to accompany you. There will be enough oxygen for you: in the upper layers of the ocean there is fresh water. The way will take you five more days. It will be the most difficult part.

Some seals arrived. The seals and our travellers greeted each other. After a short rest and a farewell, they were in the ocean. It was on the right side that was full of ice, everything breathed cold up and opaque darkness. The seals swam faster than the pikes. They didn't ask for anything. Masha the Seal offered Perchlet some of her milk as a refreshment. He tasted it. Her milk was very tasty. Perchlet liked it a lot. He had barely eaten anything by this point, save for some worms earlier. Ahead

of them, a large gully came in sight; it was couple of kilometres long and already free from ice cover. Perchlet noted to himself that even if he swam alone here, it would be faster than in fresh water. The saltiness of the water lightens a fish's body. The only discomfort was a salty bitterness in the mouth. But Perchlet swam on the surface mostly, and the seals were next to him. From this high vantage point it looked magnificent.

Ocean fishes headed to the shore because it was spawning time for them. Our hero already knew everything about the spawn thanks to Tusya and Dusya. Small cutters were furrowing the sheet of water and everything appeared to be going smoothly. But, alas, this joy did not last long. A big fishing seine net encircled the schools of fishes and our friends. Regrouping halfway, one of the seals broke through the seine net by force so its cells just came apart at the seams like rotten threads. Perchlet gathered his wits, rushed towards a newly formed

hole and was free again. The second seal partly trapped in the net and the fishermen began pulling him to the shore with their catch. Perchlet and another seal went to help him. It cost them a great effort to set their friend free. The frantic pulling at the trapped seal and the great weight of fishes caught in the seine made the net belly out like a parachute. Some of the fishes from the seine net rushed to the holes that made by the seal. After they had escaped this death trap, they thanked their rescuers. Perchlet noted silently: “What a deed of mercy we’ve done.” On his return home, he would have to give a report on his trip. In particular, he would tell of such dangerous moments as these. Hopefully, by following the example of his doings, many fishes would learn how to act in such situations. In the underwater world you can’t relax and you shouldn’t be absent minded: in a flash you may die. Our hero scorned the behavior of predatory fish, like pikes. There are numerous

fishes lived off the algae and larvae. The advantage of trouble is that it unties everyfish. But life doesn't mean troubles only. It has black and white striped, much a perch does.

## **Chapter 12. Granny Ob**

There was no more trouble. They were swimming closer to mouth of the powerful Ob river. Perchlet felt fresh water with every part of his body. Greedily, he gulped the water, he could not breathe enough! Here, the huge pikes were waiting for him. They greeted him respectfully and said to Perchlet:

- Are YOU the hero of our rivers?

- It seems I am, answered Perchlet, embarrassed. The seals said goodbye to him and swam back to the ocean, their home. All throughout the way, they had longed to climb a glacier and sunbath. Now they deserved the rest. This is what they said: "Let's loll about on the ice beach".

This time of year the sun never slips toward the horizon. Summer in the ocean was in full swing.

The huge pikes circled around Perchlet and introduced themselves finally. The bigger and stouter one said:

- My name is Ob and my friend is Vakh.

He was longer, by more than a meter, and well built. Ob the Pike offered Pechlet a space in her mouth and promised to open it from time to time so that he could breathe. The kid flinched, he didn't plan to get into a pike's mouth, especially of his own free will. Ob continued:

- We have to swim against a current for much of the way and this trick will let us do it faster.

Perchlet looked at his computer while he listened to the pike and saw that the river flows up from the south and indeed empties into the ocean in the north. Along The Yenisei river, he swum against the current holding the pike's dorsal fin. Perchlet realised that Ob the Pike wasn't being



devious, she was telling him the truth. He asked the pike to open her jaws and was stupefied – her mouth could hold about twenty perchies like he. At the same time he reckoned that it would be pretty easy to move around in there. Ob noticed his hesitations and set his mind at rest, assuring him that she was on her way to spawn in the Vakh river and she wouldn't hurt any fish till the end of the spawning. When they reached Pechlet's destination, her eggs would get ready. Her words calmed him down. He swam into her toothy mouth and from the first minute inside he found out how logically everything was planned. The journey went quicker with Perchlet in the pike's mouth, and not on her back. Her jaws were slightly opened so he could breathe easily.

Rivers were passing by, cutters and undecked boats were flashing, music could be heard. People were looking around. In a couple of hours, they swam almost a hundred kilometres. Perchlet even

took a nap on the pike's soft tongue. He had a dream that he was already at the location of the main school. It felt as if they were encircled once more with the seine nets, the pikes tried to tear through them, but they were not seals so they couldn't muster the speed and strength. And he, Perchlet, jumped out of the net's embrace and... woke up. Ob the Pike opened her jaws and Perchlet ventured out. She said: "We will spend the night here". Perchlet began whirling briskly and thought: "Thanks God, it was just a dream". They were in a small area of water near to a grassy verge. The grass had not shed its seeds in autumn and these provide a convenient snack for Perchlet. Beautiful ducks were swimming nearby and treating themselves to the seeds too. After his rest, he settled down once more without a fear in the pike's mouth, which had already become his home and cradle, and proclaimed joyfully in the words of Gagarin: "Let's go!"

## Chapter 13. Home Sweet Home

Down the natal river the rate was the same. Only turns were looming. Schools of fishes dashed aside for the enormous pikes. The news about all Perchlet's feats flew around the fishdom at the speed of light. Passing by a school, Perchlet heard fishes talking about him. But no fish saw him. He was impossible to be seen, he was travelling in the pike's mouth. Only several kilometres separated them from the main school of fishes, - and here was the school. For them, Perchlet had news. Perchlet couldn't imagine what a long journey, of thousands of kilometers, he had taken to rescue millions of fishes. Now, when his computer indicated that only a couple of turns were jammed with fishes, he understood that it really was worth to risk.

Why, if it had been a pike instead of him, swimming through the Arctic Ocean, a pike wouldn't have had enough oxygen to breathe, and

salt water would have poisoned it. He, the very small perchie, could hold the pike's dorsal fin. And what it was to get into the toothy mouth of a terrifying predator. He, and only he, suited the role of a traveller and he did this job with honour.

While the pikes were slowly passing by the school, and it looked endless, Perchlet thought:

- Maybe people are like we are: at first, going to the sea for rest, then returning hurriedly. Oh my, everything in this world is alike, earth or water world.

Finally, here was the leader of the school. Ob the Pike opened her mouth and Perchlet found himself among his fellows. He swung around nimbly to thank his fellow-trevellers. They answered briefly:

- It is the first time we have done anything like this. Even though we are predators, we eat only weak and sick fishes or fools. You know, a pike lives in the lake to keep all fish awake.

Perchlet became bolder:

- Yes, we understand you: some are victims and some are predators. The sliest is the fullest.

He thanked the pikes with a bow. The pikes swam to brood on the sandbanks. It took Perchlet only an hour to recount all of his incredible adventures: from the pit to the pike's jaws.

- Gosh, you've had a time of it! From now on you will be called Celestial Perch. You have solved the notoriously difficult problem, not everyfish could have done it. You have rescued millions of fishes. There are pikes, perches and ideo among us. We thank you and bow before you.

Ahead, there was a fork in the river and oil was leaking from the left stream. The school turned to the right – it was the parallel anabranch that would take them out to the lake.

They swam fast, the sun was bright and Celestial Perch felt happy and pleasant. Today was his first birthday. How many good things he had

done already! Only you, my dear friend, and myself know about it, and, of course, the fishes living in those rivers.

... Rising up, Alba the Albatross spotted schools of fishes. Their dorsal fins were above the surface of the water and made such a wave that the river foamed and churned. Alba the Albatross thought: “Life goes on!”

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