

Dear Diary

The Story of the Eel

By Sarah Hancock

March 2022:

I awoke to find myself gently rocking back and forth. The water is warm and cosy, but not heated by the sunlight. I am too far down to feel its rays. For a second, I question if I am the only one here, but I soon sense the presence of many others. We are all new to the world, together floating and feeling the ocean for the very first time. Our spherical cases which once kept us safe, have glided with the current and our new forms have taken shape. I cannot yet see how many strong we are, but it doesn't matter. Soon, we will all go our separate ways.

August 2022:

Twisting and turning, weaving through the current has been the last few months of my life. Some days the waters have been steady and tranquil, other times rapid and rough. I sense a few of my kind are still on the same pathway as I, but others have separated to make a different journey. Some I fear have not been as lucky. Guided by the current, I felt a sudden halt, met with a scratchy, strong object wrapped and bundled around me. The flow of the current seemed to freeze and the only motion felt was thrashing and writhing. Luckily, after what felt like weeks, I finally sensed the gentle flow of the water again, scooping me up and sending me back on track.

May 2023:

Today, I sensed danger. The waters are slowly getting cooler and the speed in which I drift has been quickened. I still cannot see, but I fear something dangerous lies ahead.

October 2024:

After being at my side for the past two years, the current that once guided me begins to weaken. With a gentle push toward the shore line, it nudges me once more, before loosening its grip and gingerly melting away. I will miss its company dearly. Now older, I am able to see the next pathway to take. Before I ready myself for a different type of scenery, I glance down at my growing shape. My body moves like a ribbon in the waves, clear to the eye, like staring through a glass window. Below me I see others of my kind. There are not as many as I first guessed, but those who have taken the same journey are like me, ready to leave the ocean waters.

January 2025:

As a new year is marked, so is a new struggle on this great journey. The first plunge into freshwater was both soothing and thrilling. The water is a little murkier at times, but mostly cool and calm. At first I began to think I would cross this part of the journey with ease, but before long, I reached many obstacles. Waterfalls and damp ground became the first hurdle, but with great determination I was able to climb and writhe my way through. Others in my group were not so lucky. Before long, I was met with an unusual structure. A great, towering object, casting a bleak shadow across the water. Whispers from my group suggest it is called a dam - a man made object. From this angle, I cannot fathom a way to get through, but I must. The journey cannot end here.

March 2025:

I have just about recovered from crossing the dam. It has taken me a few months to heal, which has in turn, slowed down my swimming pace. Nonetheless, I am feeling better, stronger and constantly alert for any more sharp blades angrily thrashing through the water. As I watch others dart and dive past, I notice their shapes have altered. They are slightly longer, but most noticeably, their colour is different. I look back at my own body and see it has darkened. What once was a clear, glass body, has turned greeny-brown. Time must be passing quickly. If I continue to swim, then soon I will reach the place I need to be.

May 2025:

Today marked the most frightening event on this journey so far. Determined to eat and build my strength, I veered slightly to the edges of what looked like a riverbank. There, I found an abundance of small fish, a welcomed sight for my hungry, now silver coloured stomach. I took some time to quickly feast, staring up at the dark night sky glistening above. As I reflected on my great journey to this point, something alien, unfamiliar, rapidly plunged into the water. For a moment I was so startled, I froze to the spot, simply staring. This strange mechanism sliced through the water, jerking and yanking the river bed. Its netted mouth opened wide and before I knew it, I was tossed in its direction. Heaved through the water, in an upward motion, I could see I was getting closer to the starry sky. Others were captured too, each twisting, squirming and attempting to break free from the netted jaws. Using any strength I had, I took one great leap, unaware or unknowing where it may land me. Fortunately, I soon plunged back into the familiar waters, dazed and disoriented. In sheer panic, I darted around to try and find a way out of this unexpected turbulence, until I eventually met the others back in the calmer river waters. I'm not sure what it was, but I suspect it has something to do with humans.

July 2025:

Finally, after a long, tiresome, three year journey, I have made it to the place I now call home - the River Thaw. Here, the waters are clear, cool, peaceful and food is plenty. Many of my kind have also made it safely to these parts, but some were not so lucky. I plan to spend the next ten years here, feasting and growing. My shape is starting to change again, the dark greeny, brown colour gently dissolving and transforming into a brighter yellow. I like it here and I am happy. For now, I will enjoy lapping up the freshwaters and enjoying the place I travelled a great distance to find. I know this is not my final destination, but for now I will relax. Until I see silvery tones glisten in the water's reflection, I am free to stay. When that time comes, I will make my final journey, retracing my steps and migrating back to the warmer ocean waters.