

**Peter Markus**

from **Bob, or Man on Boat**

See Bob fish.

Bob's right hand moving up and down, up and down.

This is Bob's hand moving Bob's bait.

Bob's bait moves up and down along the river's bottom.

The river's bottom is where Bob believes that Bob's fish is living.

If Bob believes that Bob's fish is down there along the river's bottom, then Bob's fish is down there, down along the river's bottom.

In the river Bob believes.

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The other fish in the river keep getting in Bob's way.

The other fish keep getting in between Bob and this fish that Bob is fishing for.

Bob does not want to fish up from the river these other river fish.

Bob is not fishing the river to fish for these other kinds of fish.

These other fish, when Bob fishes them up from out of the river, Bob keeps them, these fish, Bob does not throw these fish back, because he knows that he can sell them.

If Bob threw these other fish back into the river, then these other fish would still be in the way, they'd still get in between Bob and that fish that Bob is fishing for.

To this fish, Bob is faithful.

If this fish were Bob's wife, Bob would be called a good husband.

Bob would be a good catch.

And if this fish were Bob's son, Bob would be considered a good father.

As it is, Bob is, to his fish, a good fisherman.

A good fish man.

A good fishing man.

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Know this:

When you catch a big fish, what you say when you fish this big fish into the boat is, you say:

This fish is a good fish.

A keeper is what you call this fish.

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But smaller fish are good fish too.

These smaller fish, these fish we call good eaters.

These not so big fish fry up in a pan real good.

Out on the river, it is always good.

Even when the fishing's not so good, out on the river, the river is always good.

Good is a good word to use when you're out on the river.

When you're talking about a fish.

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Know this too.

There is no such fish as a bad fish.

All fish are always good.

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But a boat.

A boat is not a fish.

There are good boats and there are bad boats.

Bob's boat is a good boat because it is a boat that floats.

It is a boat that holds Bob up.

But there are some boats that leak.

There are some boats that take on water.

There are some boats that, down to the river bottom, these boats  
sometimes sink.

Like stones that disappear down and down into the river's dark.

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There are some riverfolks who know Bob who say about Bob that what Bob  
is looking for is a stone that floats.

A fish that doesn't exist.

Or maybe what Bob is looking for is this:

A fish that walks on water.

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What I say to this, what I say about Bob, is this:

Bob is Bob, I say.

I also say this: that in Bob's eyes, in Bob's heart, there is a fish  
that is more than just a fish.

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There is no such fish that is just a fish.

Every fish is a beautiful fish.

Every thing that is beautiful in this world is a fish.

The moon is a fish.

The river is a fish.

The stars in the sky.

The stones in the river.

The mud on the river's bank.

Fish.

Fish.

Fish.

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Starfish.

Stonefish.

Mudfish.

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Bobfish.

This is the fish in the river—this is the fish in the world—that I am fishing for.

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Question for Bob:

Why a fish?

Answer from Bob:

Why not a fish?

To fish.

A fish.

It is as simple as this.

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There is no other way for me to say this.

It happens again.

Bob is gone.

Bob is gone again.

Bob is gone fishing is what you must be thinking.

So what?

What's the big deal?

I'll tell you what the big deal is.

The big deal is this:

Not only is Bob gone.

But Bob's boat is gone now too.

Bob's boat is gone and Bob's boat, it hasn't come back.

This is not like Bob.

This is not like Bob's boat.

It's true, Bob likes to go out in his boat fishing all night long, but Bob likes to be back in by morning.

The morning has come and gone and it has come and gone again twice since Bob has been gone out fishing for that fished for of his fish.

I've gone looking, all up and down this river, the past two days, looking for Bob.

I've gone looking for Bob out into the lake.

I've asked about Bob all around the river.

I've asked about Bob all around the lake.

I've asked the captains of ships.

I've asked the three keepers of the lighthouse.

Have any of you seen Bob?

All heads shake no.

No, no one has seen the likes of Bob since three days before today.

Today is Sunday.

On Sundays, the river is always thick with boats.

Some of these boats are boats out on the river fishing for fish.

Others of these boats are not on the river fishing for fish.

These other boats out on the river are just out on the river being just boats.

There are people in this world who like to ride up and down on the river on their boats.

These people like the river just because the river is a river.

It doesn't matter to people like this that there are fish living in the river.

These people who like to ride up and down on the river in their boats, most of these folks don't know about Bob.

To these people, Bob is just another fishing man, Bob is just another fishing boat fishing on the river.

These folks don't know the Bob that we know.

Did you know this about the river?

There are places on this river, on days like today, when you can walk across the river jumping from boat to boat.

This kind of a river is, in Bob's eyes, a river not worth pissing his

piss in.

This is my river, Bob sometimes wanted to yell this out to these boats.

Go find yourselves some other river to fish or not to fish.

On days like this, Bob would sit in his boat and Bob would wish they would all just go away.

By Sunday night, Bob's wish, it would be answered.

These other boats bogging up Bob's river would all go back to where they came.

And the river, that river that Bob loved best, the river with Bob's boat fish-ing on it, like a good dog, this river, as day turned to night, this river would come right back.

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Every boat on this river that knows about this river knows who I am speak-ing about when I ask about Bob.

There is only one Bob on this river.

There is only one boat on this river that is the boat that is Bob's.

There is only one boat on this river that is the boat that is Bob.

Bob is what makes Bob's boat what Bob's boat is.

I've seen other boats that look like Bob's, but I haven't seen the boat that is Bob.

You know Bob? I say.

I say, I'm looking for Bob, I say.

Nope, nope, we haven't seen him, say some.

We saw him head out on the river last week, say a few others.

We used to see him out here on his boat every day, say some others still.

Check the lake, they say.

They look out past the lighthouse.

They look out towards the lake.

They say, That's where the big fish are.

Where the big fish are, they tell me, that's where Bob might have gone out fishing

Yes, I say, I know, but the lake is big.

Looking for Bob out on the lake would be like Bob looking for the fish  
that Bob has been looking for.

These folks nod their boat bobbing heads, yes, that's true.

We don't know what else to say.

The moon at night goes from halfway to whole.

It gets a little bit darker every day.

In the mornings, the sun rises.

At night, the sun sets.

But Bob is still gone.

Gone where is what I want to know.

Gone fishing is all I know.

So go fish, I tell myself.

Go fish, Bob.

Go fish Bob, Bobber.

It is the river that tells me this.

Bob is a fish, it whispers.

Bob is a fish.

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When you fish for fish, you do not see the fish you are fishing for  
until you fish the fish up and out of the river.

But still, even though you cannot see the fish, you know that the fish  
are there.

You believe this.

Somewhere.

In the river.

Under the river.

The fish are there.

A fish is near.

So I believe.

I believe that Bob is here.

Bob is there.

Somewhere.

On the river.

In a boat.  
There lives a man.  
There fishes a man.  
Bob.  
Even though I do not see Bob.  
I know that Bob is here.  
I keep on fishing.

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Go fish.

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To fish.  
To fish the fish that is more than a fish.  
We fish.  
We are fishing.  
We fished.  
We kept on fishing.  
We fished until there was nothing left to fish.

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Once upon a time there was a river.  
Once upon a time there was a fish.

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Once upon a time there lived a man.  
Once upon a time there lived a fish.