

SECRETS OF A RIVER SWIMMER

by S.S. Turner

EXCERPT

My thoughts drift to picture what life as a gillie must be like. I imagine you start the day by carrying all the fishing equipment your fat and wealthy clients will need for a day of luxurious and fully-catered fishing. You carry everything while they take it easy, and you locate the best spot to fish for the largest possible salmon. Your local knowledge about fishing spots has to be extraordinary. You then set up the fishing rod, position your client in the right spot, and talk them through what they need to do to catch that magic fish they're all searching for. Of course, your clients are always searching for the largest catch of the season, so they can go home and brag to their friends and family about what skilled fishermen they are. It's obvious to you, if not to them, that the subtext is being able to sing to the world that they have massive willies, bigger than everyone else's.

Beyond fishing, you're forced to listen to whatever the hell it is your clients want to talk about for the eight long hours you're on the river. Your clients are all obscenely wealthy, so it's more than likely you'll hear a lot of moaning about all the small things in life they'd like changed. Many of them will complain about local wind farm developments, council plans to develop their neighborhood, and, of course, the big one: immigration. They all believe immigrants are responsible for all the problems in the world. These people are your quintessential NIMBYs, and will always complain about progress if it affects them in any way, no matter how minor. You do whatever you can to bring the conversation back to fishing because it's an easier conversation for you, and less productive grounds for their complaining. They're slowly sucking the life out of you with their negativity, so you carefully select your words to bring the conversation onto a more positive pathway. And, of course, your ultimate back-up plan, as it is for many British people, is to pull out the ultimate conversation filler when you're at rock bottom: the weather. Yes, it's a desperate move and the equivalent of holding up a white flag, but needs must.