LAND OF CONTRASTS

Hedge or ditch shall hold me. Venator. Gentleman Huntsman, where found you this Otter Huntsman. Marry, Sir, we found her a mile  
from this place, a fishing she has this morning eaten the greatest part of this Trout; she has only left thus much of it as you see, and was fishing for more; when we came we found her just at it: but we were here very early, we were here an hour before sunrise, and have   
given her no rest since we came; sure she will hardly escape all these dogs and men. I am to have the skin if we kill her. Venator. Why,  
Sir, what is the skin worth Huntsman. It is worth ten shillings to make gloves; the gloves of an Otter are the best fortification for your   
hands that can be thought on against wet weather. Piscator. I pray honest Huntsman, let me ask you a pleasant question: do you hunt a   
beast or a fish Huntsman. Sir, it is not in my power to resolve you; I leave it to be resolved by the college of Carthusians, who have   
made vows never to eat flesh. But, I have heard, the question hath been debated among many great clerks, and they seem to differ about  
it; yet most agree that her tail is fish: and if her body be fish too, then I may say that a fish will walk upon land: for an Otter does so  
sometimes, five or six or ten miles in a night, to catch for her young ones, or to glut herself with fish. And I can tell you that Pigeons   
will fly forty miles for a breakfast: but, Sir, I am sure the Otter devours much fish, and kills and spoils much more than he eats. And I   
can tell you, that this dog fisher, for so the Latins call him, can smell a fish in the water a hundred yard from him: Gesner says much  
farther: and that his stones are good against the falling sickness; and that there is an herb, Benione, which, being hung in a linen cloth  
near a fish pond, or any haunt that he uses, makes him to avoid the place; which proves he smells both by water and land. And, I can tell  
you, there is brave hunting this water dog in cornwall; where there have been so many, that our learned Camden says there is a river  
called Ottersey, which was so named by reason of the abundance of Otters that bred and fed in it. And thus much for my knowledge of  
the Otter; which you may now see above water at vent, and the dogs close with him; I now see he will not last long. Follow, therefore,  
my masters, follow; for sweetlips was like to like to have him at this last vent. Venator. Oh me all the horse are got over the river, what shall  
we do now shall we follow them over the water Huntsman. No, Sir, no; be not so eager; stay a little, and follow me; for both they and  
the dogs will be suddenly on this side again, I warrant you, and the Otter too, it may be. Now have at him with Kilbuck, for he vents  
again. Venator. Marry so he does; for, look he vents in that corner. Now, Ringwood has him: now, he is gone again, and has bit the  
poor dog. Now sweetlips has her; hold her, sweetlips now all the dogs have her; some above and some under water: but, now, now she is  
tired, and past losing come bring her to me, sweetlips. Look it is a bitch otter, and she has lately whelp’d. Let’s go to the place where she  
was put down; and, not far from it, you will find all her young ones, I dare warrant you, and kill them all too. Huntsman. Come,  
Gentlemen come, all let’s go to the place where we put down the Otter. Look you hereabout it was that she kenneled; look you here it  
was indeed; for here’s her young ones, no less than five: come, let us kill them all. Piscator. No: I pray, Sir, save me one, and I’ll try if I  
can make her tame, as I know an ingenious gentleman in Leicestershire, Mr. Nich. Segrave, has done; who hath not only made her tame,  
but to catch fish, and do many other things of much pleasure Huntsman. Take one with all my heart; but let us kill the rest. And now  
let’s go to an honest ale house, where we may have a cup of good barley wine, and sing Old Rose, and all of us rejoice together. Venator.  
Come, my friend Piscator, let me invite you along with us. I’ll bear your charges this night, and you shall bear mine to morrow; for my  
intention is to accompany you a day or two in fishing. Piscator. Sir, your request is granted; and I shall be right glad both to exchange  
such a courtesy, and also to enjoy your company. The third day Venator. Well, now let’s go to your sport of Angling. Piscator. Let’s be  
going, with all my heart. God keep you all, Gentlemen; and send you meet, this day, with another Bitch otter, and kill her merrily, and  
all her young ones too. Venator. NOW, Piscator, where will you begin to fish Piscator. We are not yet come to likely place; I must  
walk a mile further yet before I beam. Venator. Well then, I pray, as we walk, tell me freely, how do you like your lodging, and mine   
host and the company Is not mine host a witty man Piscator. Sir, I will tell you, presently, what I think of your host: but, first, I will tell  
you, I am glad these Otters were killed; and I am sorry there are no more Otter killers; for I know that the want of Otter killers, and the  
not keeping the fence months for the preservation of fish, will, in time, prove the destruction of all rivers. And those very few that are  
left, that make conscience of the laws of the nation, and of keeping days of abstinence, will be forced to eat flesh or suffer more  
inconveniences than are yet foreseen. Venator. Why, Sir, what be those that you call the fence months Piscator. Sir, they be principally  
three, namely, March, April, and May: for these be the usual months that salmon come out of the sea to spawn in most fresh rivers.  
And their fry would, about a certain time, return back to the salt water, if they were not hindered by weirs and unlawful gins, which  
the greedy fishermen set, and so destroy them by thousands; as they would, being so taught by nature, change the fresh for salt water.  
He that shall view the wise statutes made in the th of Edward the First, and the like in Richard the second, may see several provisions   
made against the destruction of fish: and though I profess no knowledge of the law, yet I am sure the regulation of these defects might be  
easily mended. But I remember that a wise friend of mine did usually say, that which is everybody’s business is nobody’s business if it  
were otherwise, there could not be so many nets and fish, that are under the statute size, sold daily amongst us; and of which the   
conservators of the waters should be ashamed. But, above all, the taking fish in spawning time may be said to be against nature: it is like  
  
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