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A Fish Story

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My wife insists on watching me fillet the fish I catch. She brings her lawn chair out back while I hose off the concrete slab I use to clean them on. She watches me intently, making sure to say how good I am with knives, how easy I separate the flesh from bone and slice the skin away. She likes for me to open up their stomachs and pull the contents out -- half-digested crayfish, minnows, bugs, bait, and even plastic worms. If the stomach is empty, she tells me to turn it inside out so she can see the ridges which, to her, look like a brain. When I finish one, I hand her the fillets. She sprays them off, lightly, so they won't tear, and leaning down so I can see her cleavage, places them in the bucket. Then she fills it, swirls the water with her free hand, and talks to the fillets, telling them how nice they are, telling them to swim. She is serious, all the while looking straight at them and chanting her words. She gets sexier as she goes. By the time I finish, her cheeks flush and burn, but I just go about my business like nothing's happening. I watch her pull fillet after fillet from the bucket and shake each one until it's dry enough to carry in the house. I bury all the bones and guts and skin and take my time cleaning off the slab and putting up my gear, placing my rods along the cellar wall and straightening my tackle boxes. I smoke a couple cigarettes and close the cellar door behind me when I leave. The house is silent when I enter. The first uncooked fillet rests on a plate smackin the middle of our foyer, and next to it, her shoes. I take the plate and follow her nylons up the stairs.
to the second plate. Two fillets, her blouse.
I pile the fish on my plate. Down the hall,
three fillets, her skirt. I pile the fish.
The final plate's outside our bedroom door.
Four fillets and her favorite lace panties.
By now I'm sure she knows I'm standing there.
She starts to coo and rustle on our bed
while I kneel down and heap the last fillets
on my full plate. I touch her panties, feel
the moisture soothe my fingertips, and rub
my nails back and forth against the door
as gently as I can. She gets louder
and wilder. I crack the door enough
to watch her work. Her hands are skimming
across her breasts, rippling her skin like wind
over water. I feel faint and almost drop
from excitement. Holding my plate,
I swing the door wide open with my foot.
I stare, I gawk, I ogle over her
until she calls me in. I go to her
and set the heaping plate between her legs.
My clothes are sticking to my skin. I itch.
She strips the top fillet from the pile,
draws it down one leg, up the other,
then up her stomach, around her breasts,
hers shoulders, and her neck, brings the meat
to her mouth, kisses it, and licks it clean.
It glistens in her hand. She puts it back,
and I lift the plate and put it on the floor.
I fake a cast, pretend to bump
an orange Salty Craw across the bed.
She doesn't hit. I fake a cast and touch her
with my hand. She quivers once and strikes so hard
I think my arm will snap. I pull back hard
and try to horse her home, but she won't come
that easily. I have to work my way
around the bed while she, with her hands
around my wrist, rolls back and forth.
When she's tuckered out, I pull that slick
and gorgeous trophy in and look at her.
She sighs a little, so I ask her what
I ought to do with her. Now I've caught her, now she's mine. I grab her by the arms, holding them tight enough to settle her. I make her answer me. She says, *I'll do you favors if you let me go.*

*Like what,* I say, and watch the color rising on her chest. She says she'll fan my spawning bed with her tail and keep the bluegill and the crayfish out. I tell her that's not good enough. She breathes in deeply, and then it comes: she offers to fulfill my wildest dreams. I start to tell her that I love her, but she's all over me in nothing flat. Her mouth's on mine, and I can taste the fish she licked a little while ago. She pulls my t-shirt up above my head and yanks it off, and soon enough I'm naked to the bone. She says I've got the kind of worm she needs and takes me in her mouth. I fall back on the bed and tell her what a fish she is. She keeps on going, bobbing her head, twisting it until I'm ready to scream. And then she stops. *I want to spawn,* she says, climbing up beside me. I let her roll on top of me and tell me that she's lonely, that sexy fish like her are really sad and spend their days swimming by themselves in all the darkest coves which they can find. I kiss her neck and squeeze her to me. She kisses back. I tell her now, for real, that I'll swim with her through anything the years throw at us, through weather bad and good, through indifferent days and months when the whole sky is gray and overcast with doubt. I tell her that I love her, that I wouldn't let her swim alone through this lake's dark and tangled coves. We taste each other's grit and decide to go do it in the tub. We bring the plate
and set it on the sink top just for luck, then turn the shower on and step in the tub. I grab a bar of soap and lather her down until she's slicker than a channel cat. She does the same for me, and we rub up against each other in the rising steam and let our lather mix like fish spunk as it swirls down our legs and drains away. Moaning like catfish, our bodies quaking, she lets me work my way into her. We go until we're spent and tangled together against the bathroom wall. The closest hand will shut the water off, and we will come apart eventually. But it's good to stand here, flesh to flesh, where we'll come clean in the easy water and make a plan for how to cook the fish. Maybe we'll bake or fry or broil it, serve it with a garden salad, potatoes, fresh beans, a bottle of chardonnay. I admit I like it spicy best of all because that's how I like to think of her: the way she tastes and feels, the way she moves when I come home and show her what I've caught.