

## “Worms”

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We'd been out most the morning, out before the break of day. Dad says the best time's around breakfast most days, fish with sleep in their eyes have no complaints about which bait to take. Dad cleans the boat in the driveway, the sun cracking his clay skin and his hose cutting the sea-sand from the hull. He moves stiff like he's forgotten, like it's his first cleaning and like he knows he's being watched. He's moving but also seeing behind him without looking. Dad knows it's covering him—the watching—it's going hard like sand in the sun and making him tense. His dad, my Pa, sits with me on the porch, his eyes an owls. He's watching the spray, the drops and sand dissolving on *still* his boat. The lawn chair bends beneath him and I know the wood under it has marks from his sitting all morning. We sit around a plastic patio table, a beer and an orange juice together, him watching and me watching him watch. His yellow toenails show in sandals. Overhead the roof extends and covers the table, stopping the sun and catching the sea smell above us. If you lift your head you can almost taste it.

“You get anything out there?” he says, looking hard at the sand and spray.

“I got a big drum at Laurie's,” I say, wiping at my yellow lips. “Reeled it in for half an hour. Brought it in myself.”

“Did you now?” he says, his eyebrows gone up. “Where's this big drum of yours then? I still haven't seen it? Think maybe it slipped between the porch slats?” He smiled and looked to me, then getting worried went back to the sand and spray.

“I did,” I said. “I promise. Dad made me let him go because of his size. He said he was too old for eating. Said he had worms.”

Dad went to the side of the house near the tap, turned the water up full and the spray cut along the grass and dirt before he lifted it. The boat was clean from what I could tell but still he lifted, maybe seeing something I didn't and let it pound the side of the boat.

“Worms?” said my Pa, loud and turning again. His face was wooden and he pulled the medical tubing taped to the crook of his elbow. “What's your Dad know about worms...”

I suppose he was right and that it wasn't really the worms Dad knew about. It was more the part after I think, the letting go. Seeing the old drum there and knowing he'd been around long enough to let his skin go hard and his eating go bad, I think Dad could feel the worms and I think the whole time I was reeling he knew we'd be letting go in the end. But Dad let me get close to him, have some fun with him, bring him near the boat and net him. He watched us but knew the next part would be on him soon. He knew he'd have to pull the hook from him, hold him by his belly and look into his owl eyes. Then he'd have to do the part he'd thought about from the beginning, the part that he'd known about all along. And he did.