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The Fish

by Holly Raber

Scomber Scombrus the humble Mackerel lies marooned on a Cornish Blue plate its sticky shellacked surface emitting a tang of wood smoke and summer. My fork and traces its fleshy ravines releasing rivulets of fragrant oil. Yielding to my pressure the glossy walnut veneer cracks and reveals the creamy flesh beneath. Fat flakes each one like a nicotine stained fingernail fall away from the slick skin.

How sad, I think to be entombed in this tarry carapace, denatured, a faded facsimile of its former silver backed self. A pelagic prince, a fish amongst fish it swam fin to fin, in a satin shoal. Its piscine body once a minor miracle filtering air through blood red gills, flaring like the pliant folds of an accordion. A beady eyed pupil, a reluctant schoolboy in uniform stripes did it stray unwitting into the net? Did it feel the silken filaments sealing its fate?

I glance at the torn, tea stained recipe and my mother's voice rises clear and shrill from the page, 'Don't forget the pin bones...!' Painstakingly I sift the smoky fish searching for the tiny pellucid bones while my spectral sous chef purses her lips. I add cream cheese, thick and yellow, unctuous and decadently soft, it smothers the fish.

Delighting in my solitude I lick the fork enjoying the muscular flick of my tongue, musky sweetness fills my mouth. I stir in horseradish, acrid and astringent, my eyes watering at its silent reproof.

My mother's voice trapped forever in the greasy patina on the page plaintively suggests Melba toast, a garnish of watercress and a squeeze of lemon. I slam the book shut and pile the fresh pate on warm white toast, unadorned. I eat this sitting on the kitchen table and wonder as the buttery juices slide down my chin why it is easier to kill a phantom than a reality.