

Salmon of Wisdom (novel excerpt, Jimmy Gollihue)

by George LaCas

He can hear his mama, even when he can't see her, the fog and murk of dreams like dusty shadows, but her voice is there, will always be there, thinks Jimmy, Jimmy in bed asleep, and Little Jimmy with Mama in the kitchen.

A drawer opens, kitchen tools rattle, she lifts the can opener, his stomach murmurs, metal against metal and a grinding, a turning, the scent of food, the aroma of a new day. The clink of a metal can lid as it settles amid the metal cans of days previous, shift and stink of the garbage.

Honey, you eat this salmon, now, there's mayo in the fridge, if that ain't no good just eat it with crackers, I wish I had time to cook you a hot dinner, but Mama's got to go to work. This here salmon will make you smart, and it'll help you find your way in the world. Mama loves you, baby.

More metal on metal, as the trailer door opens and closes, and Little Jimmy smells the wake of her leaving, the perfume and menthol cigarettes.

Ain't no mayo, good or bad. Ain't no crackers neither. But Little Jimmy finds his best spoon in the drawer, the one with the fancy metal handle with the knight on it, and he eats the salmon out of the can. This he does see in the dream—the roll of fish, the top of the skeleton, pink-orange beads in the viscous water, but mostly it's the briny salmon, the taste of life.

The spoon in his hand is his sword, and he is the knight, and the grease on his fingers just makes his grip tighter.

