

What We Do with the Fish After We Gut the Fish

We eat the fish. Our mother fries up the fish in a cast iron skillet that spits up buttery fish fried grease every time she drops a breadcrumb-battered fish fillet into the pan. We sit at the kitchen table in front of our empty plates and listen to the pop and pizz and sizzle of the frying up fish. Just yesterday these fish were swimming in the muddy waters of our muddy river and now they are gutted and headless and chopped in half and about to be swallowed into our open mouths, our empty bellies. Our father is outside, in the shed, sharpening his knives. When all the fish have been fried up hard to a crisp-shucked golden-colored brown, our mother will tell us brothers to call in our father to come inside to eat the fish. Fish on, we will tell him. Come and get them while they're good and hot. Our father comes when us brothers call. He tracks mud into our mother's kitchen. Our mother tells our father look what you've done. He looks down at his boots and says the word mud. Our mother throws up her hands and then she throws the skillet of fried-up fish at our father. The fish skid across the kitchen floor. Our father tells our mother that he and us sons caught and cleaned out the guts of those fish. Our mother tells our father he knows what he can do with those fish. Then she tells us how she hates fish and fish smells, how she hates this fishy river, how much she hates this fishy, smelly town. Leave, our father says to this. Our mother says maybe she will. They both turn and walk away, our father back outside, our mother into hers and our father's bedroom. Us brothers are left with the fish, are left to clean up the mess. We drop down, onto our hands and knees, onto the floor, and begin to eat.