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THE MAN WITH THE STOLEN EYES

by Lala Heine-Koehn

The man walking beside me pushes
a large fish ahead of him. Its
great body, of a curious kind
slithers on the pavement, the man's
spliced fingers hold the twitching
tail firmly.

Madam he says, his other hand saluting,
*I was looking for you this morning
and the morning before. I have this
urge to ask you to be my mistress.
Though first, we must establish
our future relationship on solid
grounds. Tomorrow you will be busy
eating fish and I must eat it
the day thereafter. The problem is,
I cannot light a fire or do
a thing on the Sabbath. Would that
interfere with your faith?*

Not necessarily I answer, *my mother,
a Russian Orthodox, crossed us,
her three children, 3 times in the morning,
then again at night. My father
insisted only that we were confirmed
at fourteen, he being a mild
Protestant. One of my brothers is
a convert. The other, up north keeps
the souls and bodies of Lutherans
from freezing. As for myself,
I say The Rosary each night,
make the Sign of the Cross passing
a church, be it Russian Orthodox,
Protestant or a Synagogue. The only
thing worrying me is, I am also
superstitious—a man with black hair
pushing a fish ahead of him?*

No matter the man says, *just consider
my offer. You see, they stole*

*my eyes for someone else, and instead
of a white cane I am pushing
this fish. But lucky for me, they left
my other senses intact. And my sense
of smell is telling me you are right
for me. This is what I propose:
since we both have to eat fish
(you on Friday, and I the day thereafter)
do come, live with me. I will keep
the fire going 'til Friday, then you'll
chop off a piece of this fish
for your dinner, (it will not matter,
the fish is quite large). The next day,
you take over and cook another chunk
for me in a broth with carrots,
parsley and onions. (O yes, don't
forget the almonds.) After, just light
my seven-arm candelabrum, sit by me
and watch me eat the Sabbath meal.
The rest will take care of itself
for I am a loving person under my skin.
(some say I am a self-confessed
misanthrope, but that's just a
quoted line.) I have touched your
sleeve and know there is more
underneath it. I want to write
about you in Braille.*

All is well, as he said. He keeps
the fire going until Friday,
I take over when the clock
strikes midnight. We go for walks,
hand in hand, with the other
hand he pushes what is left of the fish,
its backbone and tail (the head
I cooked last Sabbath) the fish
guiding us now quite docile.
He reads to me, touching my knuckles
affectionately as they flex,
respond to his poetry.