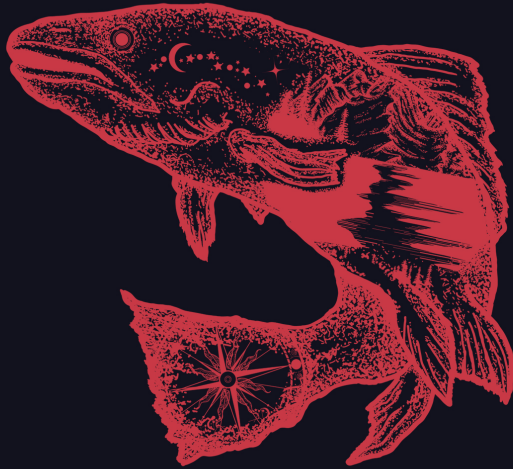


STRANGE  
FISH



MILTON SCHORR



## STRANGE FISH

*Other books by Milton Schorr*

A Man Of The Road

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Strange Fish

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‘All my life, my heart has yearned for a thing I cannot name.’

– André Breton

# PART I

## CHAPTER ONE

The boy has his line in the water, and through it he can feel everything. The gentle pull of the current below, the creaking of the kelp beds as they swirl in the green water, and the clicking of the *kray* as they tiptoe their way over rock and shell, hungry.

The surface glitters. He closes his eyes against the glare. Here in the northern channel, between the outer rocks of the Island, all is feel but for the slapping water against the hull of the little boat. All is the line.

Around his bare feet five fish lie, four of them *spookvis*, ghost-grey and flat and blunt. They stare, eyes sightless mirrors to the sky, while the fifth, a strange one, continues to gasp. The boy looks at it, scowling. The fish is grey also, but there is a shimmer between its scales: a rainbow rippling in the rain. He has not seen such a fish before. It lies quiet, its gills fanning the empty air.

‘Strange fish,’ he mutters into his sparse beard.

He turns from his catch to the sea. The Sentinel rises above him, a ten-foot tower of black rock marking the edge of the island cluster that he has known always. Beneath it, on the green water, a tiny white V trails from his line. He allows his eyes to relax, the V melting into the clouded water. Once again he feels down, all of his attention diving to the hook and its meat, and through it, searching for a sign.

The ocean breathes.

Something plays in him, a flitting in his stomach, a tightening.

The line falls from his finger.

The corner of his lip tugs upward, ever so slightly.

There.



A slow pull and then nothing. But it is enough.

*Twee faam* – two fathoms – beneath him a *spookvis* has the bait in its sucking mouth. He can see the little fish in his mind's eye. Tasting quietly, eyes open as the pleasure of the wet meat seeps through. Inside the bait is the hook, but the fish does not know it.

'*Eat,*' he murmurs.

'*Eat,*' agrees the fish.

He knows his quarry is still testing, tasting. When the line begins a longer pull, so slight that only instinct will show it, he will know the fish has begun to turn and swim. Then he will strike.

He watches the line, listening, waiting.

A chill runs through him. He looks up to the horizon. A bank of white is laid out, reaching from the sea halfway to the midmorning sun.

He frowns, looking back down at the fish between his feet.

Only five.

The fog is moving at speed. When it hits the fish will dive away and there will be nothing for it but the slow way home, watching for the Island's rocks rising from the gloom.

His eyes return to the water and his ears to the gentle creak of the line on his finger. There it is. That pulling, lighter than air, that slow pressure of a sucking mouth.

'*Eat,*' he murmurs, raising his eyes to the approaching fog.

'*Eat,*' hums the little fish.

Bang! The line razors through the green water, his rubber-covered fingers curling as it cuts the little one below.

*Swish-swish, swish-swish,* he hauls the fish in, his arms slapping against his rubber-suited sides, the glistening coils of the line gathering at his feet.

There it is! That faint silver in the green, a flashing disk down there. He pulls, now seeing the tail, the fin, and the eye, as it comes fighting to the surface with the hook in its mouth.

The creature bulges beneath the veil, magnified, until he reaches down and takes the line in a turn around his wrist and plucks it from the water. He swings it clear and lets it slap down on the thwart, criss-crossed with the years of his knife. Another *spookvis*, as grey and flat as the others. He lays a hand to its gasping and twists the hook from its throat. It falls to the bottom and sets to dancing against the smothering air, as quickly he turns to his motor and jerks it to life.

He swings the boat in an arc beneath the Sentinel, setting his bow to home.

‘Only six.’ The words drip through his mind as he speeds across the water. ‘Only six.’

Five are *spookvis*, the last still wet and kicking. But the sixth is different, a strange colour pulsing through its flesh. It lives still, one eye watching the fading sun.

Hours later the fog has burned away and the little town of the Baai shimmers in the summer heat. The boy makes his way along a rutted track through the veld. He pulls against his cart. With only six in the bed the frame is heavier than the load. The cart’s wooden wheels dig into the sand; his dusty toes dig in also. The sand is hot between them.

‘Just six,’ he mutters through his twisted lip. It would have been easier to carry them, but the cart had to be taken home anyway.

The smell comes first: a blend of salt, and fish, and diesel. And now he sees it. Ahead of him rises the *fabriek* – the factory – a rash of low buildings clustered near the water, not far from the high-tide mark. The old jetty stands

rotten among the rocks and the lapping sea, unused for twenty years since the trucks and the highway came.

He winds his way between the low fynbos – hardy plants built for drought, and salt, and sun. He leans against the weight of the cart as he crosses the boundary line. The sand lies soft and thick in a bank here, a jerk to pull it over, and then the wheels take to concrete and the cart lightens. It clatters behind him.

He stops to let a forklift pass; it whirs on its electric wheels with a crate of salted *harder* held high, and then on he goes, into the shadow of the open sorting floor.

A row of women are cleaning and filleting a meagre catch of *harder* for the salt racks. Thin fingers of fish slip down the line and through their deft hands. He keeps his head low, his eyes on the ragged floor. He knows they see him. All of them, looking at the one pulling his cart, who would call himself a fisherman. Through his brows he looks up and to his left. There is the office above the factory floor. The door is ajar; he marks that. His knuckles tighten on his pull bar. An open door means one thing: the owner of the *fabriek* is here.

The big weighing scale lies ahead of him. Once he has logged his catch he will be able to leave. He begins to hurry.

‘And, how goes?’

The boy stops, caught. It is Salie the storeman who has spoken; Salie, the keeper of the scale.

He does not answer. Instead he merely nods while keeping his eyes to his bare feet.

‘*Is die chokkie leeg?* – Is the cart empty?’ asks Salie, walking up and peering into it, his notebook and pencil in hand.

The boy does not respond. He stands stoop-shouldered, the yoke of the cart hanging loose across his chest.

‘And the sea?’

‘Nothing good,’ whispers the boy.

‘Hell now!’ Salie gives a short whistle and taps the side of the cart. ‘Look at that!’

The boy scowls, his eyes fixed to his feet. ‘Jonny, you got a rainbow fish!’

‘A rainbow fish?’

‘That’s a good fish,’ says Salie, reaching down to prod the shimmering creature. ‘Hell, look! It’s still breathing!’

The boy peers into his cart. In the bottom lie his five *spookvis*, dead. But the sixth... Its gills fan the empty air while its eye looks up to them. To the boy it seems to see them and see beyond them.

‘Rainbow fish. That’s a good eating fish.’ Salie leans in close to the boy, speaking low. ‘You want to trade it? I’ll give you a pallet of *harder...*’ Salie nods to the women, their hands raking fish, and then he glances up to the office with its door ajar. ‘Your weight will look much better.’

The boy studies the bright fish. He shakes his head and instead reaches down to scoop it up. He opens his tuck box fixed to the front of the cart and slips it in.

Salie shrugs. ‘It’s a good eating fish, you will have a good supper tonight.’ The storeman claps the boy’s shoulder and smiles into his eyes. Old Salie. The boy knows this face well. He is about to return the smile, when Salie frowns.

‘Watch out,’ he whispers.

The boy turns to look. In the bustle of the sorting floor a man is lumbering towards them. He is dressed in the clothes of the men of means of the Baai – big felt-lined boots, tiny denim shorts, a khaki shirt and a leather wide-brimmed hat, but that is where the similarity ends. He towers over the folk of the sorting floor. His boots are twice the size of their own, his head and shoulders loom above them, and despite his size he moves with an alarming grace. The women

go quiet as Uncle Mike Morkel, MD of the Hansbaai Fishing Consortium stalks down the line, a bear in shorts and shirt.

‘Jonny. How goes it?’ Rumbles the giant as he reaches the two of them. He drops his large and hairy hand onto the cart, rocking it. ‘How was the day?’

The boy does not answer.

‘He has some *spookvis*,’ says Salie.

The huge man peers into the cart, his sharp brown eyes looking down at the five lying dead there.

‘The fog came in,’ whispers the boy into his wispy beard. ‘I went all the way out to the point, before sun-up.’

‘The catch is very shit,’ says Salie, nodding.

Uncle Mike nods also, placing a massive hand between the boy’s shoulder blades, letting the warmth of his great palm seep into the bones.

‘Five *spookvis*. This is your worst catch yet.’ The big man sighs. ‘How am I going to feed everyone?’

The boy stares at his bare feet. Scales are crusted between his toes. ‘I will try the reef tomorrow,’ he whispers. ‘Maybe I’ll have some luck.’

Uncle Mike nods, and then turns his gaze back to the five fish. ‘A poor size. Weigh them, and come back to me tomorrow.’

‘I’ll need some petrol,’ whispers the boy. ‘The reef is far.’

‘No petrol. You can’t expect petrol when you bring me this.’

There is a brief pressure from the hand on his shoulder, a pressure that creaks the bones. The boy freezes, waiting, hoping, and then the pressure is gone. He turns to look, and there is the great figure of Uncle Mike striding from them, his body rising to the angular gallows of his shoulders. The boy sighs, the dread in his stomach passing as the big man climbs the steps to the office and stoops as he steps inside. Salie raises a hand to pat the boy’s shoulder.

‘The fish were not biting.’ ‘Nobody caught good today.’

Salie reaches into the cart and pulls out the inner crate, dumping the five *spookvis* onto the scale. The needle on the dial barely flickers, and Salie jots their weight down.

‘I tried. It’s the sea.’

Salie flicks the fish one by one onto the vlekking line.

‘Could I get some petrol for tomorrow, Salie? The reef is far.’

Salie glances up at the office, the door ajar. ‘I’m sorry, *seun* – my boy. He will know.’

‘But how much did others catch?’

‘You can’t expect petrol when you bring only five.’ ‘But did anyone else catch?’

Again Salie glances up to the office with the door ajar before flicking his eyes to the boy. ‘No,’ he mouths, before turning back to his paper.

‘Come on, Salie, from the back store,’ whispers the boy, reaching out to tug at the man’s sleeve. Gently, Salie pulls it away. ‘Enjoy your rainbow fish. It’s a good eating fish.’

The boy sighs. He turns his cart, his eyes to the concrete of the sorting floor, and then he heads home.

The boy’s hut stands by the side of the track, full of roof and window and door. Before the dilapidated building is a patch of sand that once contained grass, and around that is a sagging fence and a rusting gate. Behind it an apple tree rises, its leaves sparse in the summer heat. He lets go of his cart to rest under the old, patched awning. He unclips the tuck box, feeling the weight of the rainbow fish inside, and clicks through the rusted gate.

‘At least I have supper.’

He places the tuck box on the rough table outside and pulls his cutting board near. In the sparse rains of summer he prefers to cook outside and sometimes even to sleep, wondering up at the stars.

He takes his knife from its sheath and runs it across his thigh, cleaning the blood-flecked blade. With his other hand he unhooks the clasp of the tuck box and reaches inside, bringing the rainbow fish out into the light.

He places it on the table, and his blade pauses in the air.

Still, the fish is breathing. As air wafts across its ribboned gills, the little fish looks up at him.

‘Strange,’ thinks the boy.

‘*Eat?*’ he asks the little fish.

It does not answer.

He peers at the thing and sees that in its flesh there is more to be discovered: a sheen between the scales. He shifts the cutting board towards the sun. The fish comes alive, flapping in the light, its flesh filled with the colours of the sky and sea, shimmering from tail to gill.

‘What are you?’ asks the boy as he traps the fish with a gentle hand and brings it back to the cutting board. He places his palm on its flank, quieting it with his own quiet.

He slips his blade beneath the jaw of the little fish and pulls it through to the tail. He pushes the mess of intestine, lung, heart, liver and bowel aside and cuts across the tail and beneath the gills, opening the fish up to the sky. He takes it by the tail and dunks it in a bucket of sea water standing ready, cleaning it, and then he dumps the guts in the bucket also. Bait for tomorrow.

He leaves the little fish filleted, placed beneath a net to ward off the flies, then he collects fresh water from his two big drums round the side of his hut and returns to wash down the cart. With a tattered sack he scrapes it clean of scales and blood, and then he douses the sack in fresh water and leaves them to dry in

the afternoon sun, placing his freshly washed knife beside them. He climbs from his torn trousers and his tattered shirt and douses them also. Naked, he returns to the side of his shelter, where the fynbos comes creeping down from the hills, and washes his blood-caked hands before once again putting them in the clean water and washing his body. Finally clean, he lies down to rest on his mat within his hut, away from the still burning sun.

He dreams of the deep.

Later, his appetite takes him back to the fish, and he lights a fire beneath the blaze of the Milky Way. He grills the little fish and eats it, looking up to the stars. He turns his attention to the remains, scooping them out of the water. And then he pauses. Among the soft organs of the fish is something hard. He turns to light his gas lamp, and by its hissing white light he sees it: almost round, and flickering with all the colours of the fish itself. A pearl.

He plucks it from the mess in his hand and rolls it in the centre of his palm.

He lays his eye to it. In it, the future dances. The boy smiles.

Beneath the table, amidst the muck of its guts, the head of the fish lies still, its dead eye looking up to the moon.



## CHAPTER TWO

*Slip-slip, slip-slip* go his oars as he dips them in dawn's water. *Thank-you-thank-you, thank-you-thank-you* sounds his mind as he pulls the oars towards him, the handles worn by generations of fishermen, and then pushes them away so that the blades swing out, streaming cold. In the east there is pink on the water.

*'Thank-you-thank-you, thank-you-thank-you.'*

On the transom, on a pad of old and frayed fish *meel* sacking, is his pearl.

*'Thank-you-thank-you, thank-you-thank-you.'*

The sun is above the ocean when he throws out his anchor and it bubbles down to the seabed of the northern channel, only three *faam* deep. The water is clear today, the green of yesterday replaced by the sharp grey of the seabed, the brown kelp and crowds of colourful anemone. He peers over the lip of his little boat, looking through the veil left and right.

He will not see the fish, their thin silhouettes are hidden unless they turn and allow the sun to light them. But it is the shell beds he's after, mussel clusters that are a wash of black near the tideline, the perlemoen beds a brush of mottled white deeper down, clinging to the low rocks, and deeper still, hiding, sheltered by overhangs, the clam beds, the pearl beds, where he will find his bounty.

He pauses in his looking. A shadow flits across the sand, gliding and turning.

*'Eat,'* murmurs the boy, a smile on his lips.

The sea lion turns on her back to look up at him, flashing her dog-teeth.

*'Eat,'* she grins, and then glides away.

His smile turns to a frown. Out here, just north of the Island, where the continental shelf drops off to the deep ocean only a boat's length away, there are

predators also. Many times he has seen a sea lion awash in the shallows, half of it bitten away, and once he saw a man reach down to scoop up a *spookvis* that had slipped the hook and lain just beneath the surface, exhausted, and pull his wrist from the water trailing flesh and bone.

He shakes the thought away and stands up to let the new sun touch his body. He pulls off his old jersey. He flexes his arms, raising them high, lacing and unlacing his fingers, stretching all of himself as he once again looks down, scanning the ocean floor.

There, at the entrance to the channel coming in from the deep ocean, just beneath the rising finger of the Sentinel, a dark smudge on the sea floor. A clam bed, he thinks, obscured by the trailing kelp above it. Once again he lets the sun touch him, because down there it will be cold. He takes up his mask and places it over his eyes. He takes up his knife and clamps it between his teeth, and then he slips into the water. He treads there a moment, gulping his final breath, and then he dives.

*Cold.* It encases his body. *Cold.* A lens through which to see.

Swiftly he swims down to the point where rock meets bottom at the base of the Sentinel. Life springs up to meet him.

What was an orange smudge above is now a giant anemone, its fingers trailing, and spiked purple anemones, and thick and fleshy kelp rising from their anchor to find the sun. He swims strongly. He does not like being in the water. He remembers the one-handed man's scream.

Shivers wash through him as he kicks down and down, letting the pressure run through his throat and out through his ears. The drop off to the left is clearer now, the vast deep out there, the emptiness of it causing panic to rise in him. The smudge he saw from the surface crystallises into clean black rock, a perfect overhang. He kicks toward it. And then his stroke stalls.

A flicker just outside his vision.

He twists round to study the bright jumble of the channel, fear directing his hand to the blade between his teeth. Behind him the open ocean yawns, and the nerves in his back dance.

Again he kicks down, and for the first time he feels the urge to breathe. The cold crushes down on him. The sun is so far away.

Closer to the base now, he can see a smear of pink in the shadow, just as he had hoped. He smiles. Pink is the colour of clam.

And then again there is that flash on the edge of his sight. He spins to look, the whole world revolving with his turn.

Nothing but the clear cold.

He clenches his teeth now, the first convulsion pulsing through him. He has a minute left, he knows. Just enough time to make sure.

The bed comes up to meet him. It is larger than he thought, and deeper – a tunnel into the rising rock. He hangs there on the edge of the shelf, peering in.

A carpet of black mussel covers the mouth and sides, but deeper in he sees what he's looking for. He reaches in, wanting to touch and confirm the lip of the clam before he takes his blade and shucks it from the rock and rises with it to the surface, and the sun. His fingers almost brush it. And then blue pulses within the black before him, and he realises his mistake. These are not the shelled rows of a clam bed. Before he can jerk his hand free, a black finger lays itself across his wrist.

Adrenalin explodes, he needs to rip his hand away, but the black convulses again, and this time a disc opens before him. The mollusk's eye regards him, and its finger tightens.

*'Eat,'* says the giant octopus.

He pulls, jerking from spine to hand, kicking his legs up and into the rock. Every movement reveals a new black finger with a power he cannot fight. Bubbles stream from his mouth. The cold crowds in on him, freezing his eyes,

streaming down his throat. The great strength tightens, and again, convulsing, pulling him into the tunnel.

Above him a school of *spookvis* turn, slivers of dark against his little boat drifting on the surface, and beyond it the bright sun. Life begins to leave him. In a rush he understands: His time was brief, all his days are gone, and this was always to be. ‘*Thank you, thank you,*’ mutters the boy, the words plopping from his mouth into a final bubble. ‘Thank you.’

As his mind is enfolded in the slow peace of forgetting, he sees that flitting shadow again. It is rushing towards him, straight from the vast emptiness. Its impact shakes him, his synapses fire for the final time. All is confusion, for instead of the black eye of a shark here is a green one, a clear eye the colour of the water looking straight at him, and then he is gone.

He wakes to the sound of dripping water. He is desperately cold. He can feel rock at his back; his arms are numb. He opens his eyes. Above him faint sunlight dances through a hole in the rock. Where is he? Only his face is above the surface. All around him is the cold.

*‘What are you looking for?’*

The voice is inside him. It is the voice of fishes. He looks about him. But all is gloom.

*‘What are you looking for?’*

Just like the fish, the words begin as a feeling peeling through him, but unlike them these words are clear, and directed at him. He feels heat in his foot. Something has touched him, a long finger like that of the octopus. It burns, and he jerks his foot away.

*Laughter.* It chimes, soft, like the distant church bell on Sundays when he walks in the fields. There is a mind in the water with him.

‘You don’t want to eat me?’ he asks the gloom.

*'You are too big for me to eat.'*

The boy remembers the power of the animal as it dragged him into the tunnel. Perhaps this is its cave. But this voice cannot be that of the monster. This voice is laughter.

*'How can you speak?'*

Again, that laughter.

*'How can you hear?'*

Again he feels the heat upon his foot, that whisper of a limb brushing over his. He does not look into the dark water lest he see horror there.

*'Just listen,'* he says, this time speaking in the way of fish that only he knows.

*'Come to me.'*

He leans forward, wanting to, but he is afraid.

*'What are you looking for?'* The voice is playful, tugging at his heart.

*'A pearl.'*

He puts his eyes to the water. Immediately she is there, her eyes just a finger from his own. They are green, flecked with all the colours of the seabed, and they look straight into his soul.

*'Are you looking for this?'* Her hand appears, fingers tapered and unfolding around a bone white palm. In its centre is a pearl just like his own.

*'How did you find it?'*

*'It's mine.'*

*'I have one also.'* He slips further into the water, forgetting about the sun.  
*'It's on my boat.'*

*'What is a boat?'*

Both hang in the water, suspended between the above and the below.

*'I know you.'*

She nods, her eyes bright in the cold.

She laughs, bubbles streaming from her mouth.

He laughs too, and reaches his hand out to hers. *'I have heard you before. I have heard you many times, laughing among the fishes.'*

*'Why are you looking for a pearl?'*

His eyes are dark and they pierce her through the water. *'So that I can be free.'*

He reaches out his fingers, scarred from the line, and she extends her own. Their palms touch, the pearl between them. Again he laughs and the first bubbles of his new life plop from his mouth. They rise to the faraway sun.

Suddenly her fingers tighten around his and she pulls him all the way under. *'Wait!'*

But she does not listen. With frightening strength she hauls him into the deep.

In a rush they pass the opening of the cave.

*'Eat,'* he hears a growl from the curling creature there.

*'Eat,'* he replies, but they are already gone. The northern channel is behind them and below the bottom has dropped off to fifty *faam*, a hundred, an endless blue ahead, and together they rush into it.

Seven nautical miles out seagulls swirl. Below them five ships are at anchor, their lines let out to a hundred and forty-two *faam*. These ships are bright with metal, bristling with satellite dishes, and are far from their native shores. On them strange men sit attentive, cloth across their faces against the bright sun, rubber about their bodies, and on their fingers more rubber, and their white lines cut sharp as they pull tuna from the deep.

The ships have hit it right, lying across and above one of the great summer schools. The men work at speed, dropping their lines. The *dollies*, the painted lures in silver, red, and neon blue, fall in graceful arcs before being whipped

back. They trail upwards through the blue, their hooks spinning, and the tuna rise behind them, open-mouthed, and themselves go spinning to eternity.

Blood from the gaffs leaks into the water, trailing in clouds as the tuna break through, and the *dollies* plop through the red fog like bullets.

Beneath the spinning lines she and he dance, thirty *faam* deep, deeper than he has ever dived, as around them the tuna rise.

'*Eat...*' she hums as the fish surge, her voice swirling in his mind. '*Eat,*' he breathes, bubbles streaming from his mouth.

'*Eat,*' rumbles the great circling school, bunching up and then bunching down as the *dollies* spin the rays of the distant sun.

She takes his hand then and drags him down. The light fades as they sink, and the bodies of the fish press in around them.

'*Eat,*' these larger tuna moan, slowly circling in the half-light.

Further down she pulls him, to where the light is gone and the bodies of fish have grown monstrous, festooned with light.

'*Eat,*' moans the school down there, unmoved by the plopping of the *dollies* and the spinning of the young so very high above.

A fish in the dark rears, a yawning mouth and endless teeth and a soundless clash as it cuts another in two, and two more eat the head, snapping it away before the light of it is dispersed, and there is nothing but blood in the water and bodies in the dark.

And then a new sound runs through the deep.

'*Hmm,*' it sings, a vibration growing until the water around them shakes and a giant eye passes.

'*Hmm.*' An ageless sweep of its tail takes it away, back into the black. She laughs, her eyes alive with the ocean's secrets.

'*Eat,*' pounds the school.

*They are turning,* 'he thinks, as the pattern of their one thought pulses anew. *They will dive.*'

She nods and spreads her arms while the water surges around them, and the school turns, and suddenly is gone.

Quickly she takes his hand and together they rise. On the surface the *dollies* spin aimlessly as the men continue to haul them aboard, wishing the tuna to return.

She taps him on his cheek, her finger like fire on his skin. Then, with a flick of her tail she darts forward, up through the water with hand out- stretched, and she clasps one of the spinning *dollies* and turns with it so that the line cuts through the water, and then snaps. Empty, it skitters up to the great shadow floating above.

She takes his hand, and they leave the five ships far behind.

Above a man curses, clutching his hand to his chest. The finger throbs, blood leaking from the gash where the line slashed clean through the rubber and into bone.

'A giant fish,' he says to his fellows, 'a giant!'

He pulls the cloth away, and his face is foreign, his dark eyes slitted against the sun.

There are no more tuna. The men stow their catch, and wonder at the ways of this foreign sea.

That evening, as the earth turns from the sun, she and he swim in the open water.

*Where are we going?*'

She stops and puts her mouth to his, filling him with air. *Home.*'

*Where is home?*'



She breathes into him again, and again takes his hand, and they streak through the water, she with tail and he with feet born for this.

The pillars and columns of the Island return, so different from below. They glide through its channels while the water turns slowly to orange.

A *shashergasse* passes them, and she reaches out and slips her fingers between the twin slits of its gills. She cradles it, turning in the translucent kingdom, holding it as it dies. She laces her finger from gill to tail, following the ridge of bone. Half of the white meat she places in her mouth, and the other she holds out to him.

*'Eat.'*

She puts the meat on his tongue. It tastes of salt and sea. Of her.

*'It's warm down here, with you.'*

His feet hang suspended in the water, and underneath them her tail. She unfurls it, its fan spreading out until it lies flat beneath him. She brings it up to him, her fin touching his toes. She points to the surface, where only a pink glow remains.

*'Look.'*

She kicks once, raising them upward. And he sees. The same strange fish with its rainbow rippling in its scales.

*'Nightfish,'* she says.

She takes it by the belly, and the little fish relaxes in her hand. It floats with her, lulled by her touch, until she wills it and, as if waking, it waves its tail and is away into the growing night above them, swimming among the stars.

His arms open and she swims between them. He holds her, and she wraps her tail around them both.

She puts her mouth to his and breathes into his lungs. They hang there, afire within the cold.

At dawn on a glassy sea, the boy's little boat comes gliding towards the beach. His strokes are smooth and long. The bow digs into sand. Smoothly he turns, hopping out and pulling the little boat partway out of the water. He takes two paces and falls onto the still dew-damp sand, looking out over the lightening bay.

Pink in the east.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls from it his pearl. It feels like a flame. Again he looks out over the blue curve of the bay. Still as glass.

His smile mirrors the coming light.

The sun, when it appears, blooms in his eyes. 'Thank you. Thank you.'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Milton Schorr was born in 1981 in Cape Town, South Africa. He attended the University of Cape Town as a student of theatre, thereafter creating theatre works across South Africa. As a writer and actor he has received the Imbewu Scriptwriting award for his play *The Heroin Diaries*, and both the 'IDIDTHAT Best of Reel for Direction Craft' and 'Vimeo Staff Pick' award for the Porteus Xandau short film *Surrender*, and has appeared in blockbuster film productions such as *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter*, *Outlander*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Redeeming Love*. He is a renowned travel and sports writer, with credits in many of South Africa's major publications. His work can be seen at [www.pilgrimspressbooks.com](http://www.pilgrimspressbooks.com). Stay in touch with him on Social Media at [@milton.schorr](https://twitter.com/milton.schorr). *Strange Fish* is his first novel.

## ALSO BY MILTON SCHORR – ‘A Man Of The Road’

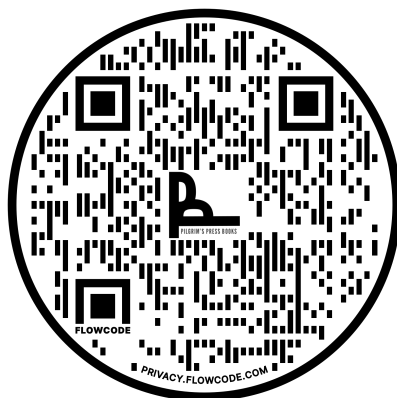
Author and actor Milton Schorr’s second novel, *A Man Of The Road*, tells the story of Little Mikey, a young boy from the mythical West Coast town of Freeburg, who must one day set out on an epic cross-country hitch-hiking journey. On his dangerous way he encounters characters from all sections of South African society, and learns what it is to be ‘a man of the road.’ The novel is based on Milton Schorr’s years of experience hitch-hiking the roads of Southern Africa, Germany and Australia, and will be available worldwide in early 2022.

## COMING SOON – ‘Strange Fish’ 2 & 3

The tale of *Strange Fish* is not complete. ‘I wrote what I thought was a third act for *Strange Fish* during July of 2020,’ says author Milton Schorr. ‘Eventually I realised that what I thought was the third act must in fact be the third part of a trilogy. This means that *Strange Fish Part Three* is largely already written, while *Strange Fish Part Two* is yet to be put to paper. I plan to do this during 2022.’ Look out for *Strange Fish 2 & 3* in 2023.

## FIND OUT MORE:

To stay abreast of Milton Schorr's coming works, tours and author activities, visit [www.pilgrimspressbooks.com](http://www.pilgrimspressbooks.com) or follow us on social media at [@pilgrimspressbooks](https://twitter.com/pilgrimspressbooks). Alternatively, scan the QR Code below by simply pointing your camera phone at it and hitting the link that appears.



## 'STRANGE FISH' IS AVAILABLE AS AN AUDIO BOOK!

Strange Fish has partnered with BiB, Africa's online audiobook platform, bringing Africa's beautiful stories to the world. Download the BiB app to your phone or computer by visiting <https://qrco.de/bblj4C> and following the prompts to Strange Fish. Alternatively, scan the QR Code below by pointing your camera phone at it and hitting the link that appears.

