The Meeting Of The Hands

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The Meeting Of The Hands

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"It had been hot and dreary in the mountains the previous few days, but on this particular day, the humidity seemed intent on dragging down all which existed. The traveller, drops of sweat falling from the ridge of his brow, gazed skyward, hand shielding his eyes from the flickers of sunlight peeking through the relenting clouds. It had been days since his last meal; he had been sustaining himself with berries and the odd unfortunate jack rabbit which hopped across his path. To look at this man one would almost certainly be struck with the feeling of non-identity-a sense of misplacement which led one to believe that this man would not fit in anywhere; not in an office building, a prison cell, or a circus trailer. An odd aura of mystique and psychosis surrounded him, like a stone-hearted hit man given to spouting couplets of Chaucer from time to time. He did not know what his destination would be, but as he hiked further up the mountain path, a feeling not unlike a homecoming swept over him. He smiled to himself."

Cover Page Footnote
The Meeting of the Hands

CHERI CRIST

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Rachel opened the wooded screen door of the expansive rustic house and trudged down the steps, a collection of Faulkner’s short stories clutched in one sweaty hand (she was currently engrossed in Barn Burning), and a dewey glass of iced tea in the other. As she stepped across the lush backyard, the morning mist gathered around the hem of her flower-printed cotton dress as if in worship. Her long chestnut hair hung in limp waves around her thin shoulders—she had not bothered to wash or brush it when she woke up, for Gary wasn’t there to see her. She paused, thinking of him. Just the sound of his name made her stop suddenly, letting hate fill her soul. Hate him as she did, it was a passive loathing; an emotion that would remain locked inside of her. Caught between the world outside, which she loved—the sweet melodies of the birds and the smell of honeysuckle on a warm day, and the world inside, a world in which her identity became that of bondswoman, submissive laborer, and most repulsive—object of brutal passion to her husband’s commanding presence. Living in such a way, Rachel always felt as though she were drowning in a sea of extremes; not allowed to be anything but what Gary required of her. As her mind clouded over and her vision began to blur with images of her tormentor, she suddenly felt a stabbing pain. Almost as if attracted by the thick smell of abhorrence, a hornet had stung her right foot. Limping painfully over to the stone bench placed before the garden entrance, she collapsed in a heap and sat, weeping blindly. Mechanically, she held the cold glass of iced tea to the swelling mass on her heel, rolling it back and forth over the area. As the sobs waned, she found herself idly contemplating the idea that wherever Gary was concerned, some form of pain was sure to follow, whether in the form of a slap, a rope burn, and yes, even a bee sting. She giggled at this last thought, her hair falling across her pale face like a curtain and, looking up, was startled to see a man standing not twenty feet from where she was sitting.

“Ethereal,” he thought to himself as he gazed at the woman. She was very beautiful, and a welcome sight to his sun-strained eyes. Yet there was a deep and penetrating sadness about her, and he felt an inexplicable urge to help ease her pain, whatever pain that might be. She looked up at him suddenly and gasped. He had not meant to scare her.

“I’m sorry—I probably should have spoken up and told you I was here before scaring you half to death,” he said.

“Who... are you?” she asked timidly.
“My name is David—I’ve been hiking in these mountains for days, I had no idea a house was here.” He wanted to talk to her more in-depth, to get at the root of her despair, but he didn’t want to frighten her off.

She paused and then said, “I’m Rachel. My husband and I live here.”

He noticed that she flinched when she said “husband.”

“Where is your husband?”

She didn’t hear him. Her eyes had a glazed look as she stared at the ground at her feet.

“Uh... where is your husband?” he asked, his voice louder.

Rachel’s head jerked up. “Oh—he’s away on a business trip. In Chicago.

But he should be back this weekend,” she added cautiously.

David noticed that she didn’t seem afraid of him specifically, so he decided to test the waters further, and sitting down next to her, said good-naturedly, “Well, do you think you could spare a room and some food for a poor hungry stranger, even though you barely know him and he has no money to pay you with? Although I’m sure my witty companionship will more than make up for my lack of financial status.”

Rachel couldn’t help smiling; his offer was tempting and he seemed nice enough, but she could hardly board a perfect stranger. David saw the indecision on her face and said, “I assure you, I’m totally harmless, unless you call Kerouac a deadly weapon.” He reached into his backpack and pulled a copy of The Dharma Burns out.

“You have Kerouac?” Rachel couldn’t hide her excitement. “I’ve heard so much about him, and I’ve always wanted to read some of his work.”

“Why didn’t you just buy the book?” David asked.

“Well, I...I guess I just never got around to it,” she replied, staring at the ground again.

“I promise, if you can put me up for the night, you may peruse Kerouac to your heart’s content,” David replied, a smile spreading across his face.

Rachel laughed. “Okay, okay. You can stay.” Her look grew serious, as if a cloud had passed over her face. “But you must leave by Sunday. That’s when Gary gets home.” She felt at ease with this stranger. When she looked at him, she was aware of a weird sort of energy pass between them—not sexual, more like a heightened perception, as if he understood all of her thoughts and desires. She trusted him, although she couldn’t understand why, because there was an odd air about him that she couldn’t quite place.

“No problem. By the way, what day is today?” asked David bemusedly.

Rachel grinned. “Today is Wednesday. Now, how about lunch? I was just going to make something for myself, but it will be nice to not have to eat alone again.” She said this as if she ate alone every day of her life. The two rose from the bench and walked into the house as a breeze swept through the yard, rustling the tree branches.

David and Rachel spent the rest of that day and all the next talking about everything from books to politics. They found that they shared a love for Mozart and pizza, and Rachel was fascinated to hear about David’s travels all over Europe. She herself had married young, and had never had the chance to “see the world”. They discussed ideas on current world topics, and discovered that they agreed on almost everything they talked about. In all of their conversation, both were aware of a kind of metaphysical thread binding them together—it was as if they had been friends all their lives. For Rachel, it was wonderful to simply talk to another human being—she had felt isolated from people for so long.

On the second night of his stay, David decided to try and get Rachel to open up about Gary. He felt very close to this woman already, as if they were kindred spirits. He thought of himself as her priest, who could cleanse her of the fear and insecurity she seemed to possess. He had to know what was going on in her psyche, and more important, to make her talk about it.

After dinner, the two sat before the blaze in the fireplace; the evening had become damp and chilly. Holding his mug of cocoa carefully, David
CIPRIAN ALMONTE: Enjoying the Few
turned to Rachel and said, "Do you get along with your husband?" There was no emotion in his voice, and his eyes looked into hers intently, prodding for an answer.

Rachel became suddenly nervous, and stood up quickly. She walked over to the fireplace and pushed absently at the pieces of wood with a poker. "Of course I do." There was a slight tremor in her voice. "Wh... Why do you ask?"

He could sense now that she was afraid, but he was still filled with an almost brutal desire to break her down completely. He continued to stare at her, his gaze never faltering.

"I know you're not happy with him. I can sense your pain... I want to help you stop the pain."

Rachel was truly frightened now, but she tried not to outwardly show it. She felt herself starting to lose control, thinking about her monster of a husband, but still, she struggled to remain calm.

"Uh, c-could we talk about something else?" Rachel pleaded, rising from the hearth and stumbling over an iron cat lazing next to the fireplace.

"I think you need to talk about this. Rachel, believe me, I can help you stop the pain. Together, we can do this. WE CAN STOP YOUR PAIN."

"Pain... stop the pain... stop the... Rachel's head spun with the incessant words, "WE can... stop... pain." Her mind flipped backward, to the time she had forgotten to scrub the kitchen floor, and Gary had rewarded her with a broken arm. To another incident, when the quilt on the bed had been rumpled from her previous nap, and Gary accused her of inviting other men to their house while he was working. The way he had shouted at her, alternating between insults and blows to her head with a rolling pin, the way she began to believe him when he called her a lazy, stupid bitch who wasn't worth the food she put on the table. It all came flowing back in one big wave of..."

"Pain... we can stop... trust me..."

"Alright!" Rachel screamed. "You want to talk about it? I am sick of being afraid all the time, not being able to do anything that might draw my interest away from him. I have no friends, no hobbies. I have NOTHING! Do you remember that copy of Faulkner I was reading the day you came? I've been hiding that for years, waiting for the chance to read it without him seeing. I hate him! You said I have a beautiful house, but it's not mine; nothing is mine. Everything is this damn house is his. HIS!" Rachel sobbed with despair. "Including me." She collapsed as the sobs came harder.

David watched the pathetic figure slumped against the wall, heaving. Now he knew it would be alright. He could help this woman now. He felt sorry for her but made no move toward her. Still standing in place he said, "You know Rachel, there are solutions for this sort of problem." He laughed, a trace of malice in his voice. "You might call me 'the vigilante of domestic problems.'"

"I hate him."

"I know, and I understand. It's good that you realize that. Now you can begin to purify your soul of the poison that has been interfering in your life," David said quietly, looking at her intently.

"But how?"

"Well, by eliminating the source of the problem, of course!" He laughed again, then became sober. "You see, it's so simple."

"Do you mean kill him?" Rachel asked dully.

He was surprised and pleased at her bluntness.

"Yes," he said simply. There was a pause. "I've thought about it before... but I'm afraid..." Rachel's voice trailed off.

"I'll take care of everything. Come here," David commanded and as if in a trance, Rachel rose and reached out toward his outstretched hands. As his hands grasped hers, Rachel could feel a definite energy pass between them.

"Ah, yes. I knew it. You've always possessed the power to carry out your dream, you just didn't know how to direct it," David said.

Rachel wondered vaguely what he meant, and then it didn't matter, because, gazing into his eyes, she became lost as the irises of his eyes began to swirl and change color. He smiled at her, and she smiled back as a wonderful sense of peace came over her. Everything would be alright now, she thought.
The old grandfather clock struck ten, and Rachel opened her eyes to find herself sitting across from David on her bed. Actually, Gary’s bed, but Rachel pushed that thought from her mind. Candles were placed sporadically across the comforter, and they provided the only illumination in the dark room. David, eyes shut tightly, was swaying back and forth, humming a low, monotonous tune. While Rachel wondered what he was doing, she felt the loathing return—a slow burn that grew in intensity, and seemed to fill every inch of her soul. She was aware of Gary’s presence, not physically, but mentally. David stopped swaying and began crumbling some dried herbs into a liquid mixture. He handed the mug to Rachel.

“Drink. And while you do, think about everything Gary has done to you over the years—the pain, the degradation, the isolation. Remember everything and concentrate on his very being.”

Rachel was too scared and curious not to obey. She drank the strange-smelling potion, and immediately a feeling resembling sensory overload crept over her. It was as if she were in many places at once. She saw many different scenes in her mind, and a few of them were from her own life. Gary’s face flashed in front of her, but she did not flinch. She was amazed at what was happening. Aware that David was drinking the same mixture, she faintly heard him say, “Hold on, Rachel. Just let the visions come—don’t fight them. And when I tell you, take my hands. Your pain will soon be gone.”

Rachel’s head spun as the scenes came more urgently. She began to feel sick, as if she were actually in motion. “Have I been drugged?” she wondered silently. She remembered David’s words and relaxed. Finally, the scenes running through her mind slowed, and then stopped. A new scene, a constant one, was in her head now. She was looking at Gary! He was in a hotel room, drawing a bath. She looked down upon him as if she were floating high above the room, and she felt powerful. Power over Gary, over the events of her past, and over what the future would hold. Finally, she was in control.

“A clean bastard, isn’t he?” David’s voice sounded in her head, startling her. She felt linked to his brain, and realized that he wasn’t speaking—what she was hearing was him thinking. “Weird,” she thought absently.

Gary moved to the bathroom, disrobing. He climbed into the water and slid down among the bubbles, closing his eyes and sighing. On the counter next to the tub was a radio blaring a depressing country tune. Rachel took special note of the long black cord running from the radio to an outlet in the wall—a lifeline. Still feeling the pain of her past, she let the hate course through her body in violent waves.

“Now,” she heard David say calmly. Eyes closed, their hands came together. Instantly, a surge of electricity raced through their grip and a wild wind came from nowhere. Rachel instinctively knew to concentrate on the radio. As if on cue, the radio slid two inches to the end of the counter and fell neatly into the tub. Rachel smiled with pleasure as she saw Gary’s eyes pop open while his body began to jerk with fierce spasms. Eyes bulging now, Gary managed to extend his arms to an invisible being and scream, “Rachel!” He was dead before the last echoes of his death-cry had reverberated around the room.

Slowly, the energy between David and Rachel fell away and, shaking, Rachel opened her eyes to see David slowly raising his head from its previous position, lolling to one side. She felt as if she had just awakened from an incredibly bizarre nightmare.

“Did...did that just really happen?”

David smiled reassuringly. “Yes. It did. You’re free now. You can do anything you want from now on.”

Rachel let his words dissolve through her, thought for a moment, and said, “Let’s get a pizza.”