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The Hand-Model

by George Blecher

A woman my father claimed was a famous hand-model lived down the street in a faux-Tudor house too big for one person. I imagined that on his way back from the office he stopped at her house. Her arms white and long reached out from the doorway and pulled him in, her tapered fingers unbuttoned his shirt, the backs of her hands ran up and down his cheeks, her clenched fists held him by the belt, her hands had a will of their own but were perfectly synchronized, like twins put on earth to make my father happy. My father's hands gripped the hand-model's waist the way the hands of men in movies gripped women in those days, with powerful, hairy fingers quivering with passion.

Sometimes I saw the hand-model drive by in a shady darkness, her fingers gripping the raised edges of the steering wheel. I caught the barest glimpses of her face, which looked pale and sad, her skin almost translucent. How could that be? Her hands were miniature goddesses, ivory statuettes. They were in magazines among perfume bottles and nail polish color charts, draped with chains of diamonds or braceleted by gold bangles and wrist watches; her hands were all my father and I needed to make us happy.

I imagined entering her house lined with dark wood paneling dimly lit by old, yellowish light bulbs. She sits at the kitchen table in the same position as my mother, her fingers spread before her, and weeps like a princess in a tower. Why are you crying, I ask her. She hugs me with her long arms, her tapered fingers. Because I can't have your father! Her hands are cool; if I held them against my chest, they would calm my pounding heart. But we both want to be with you! I cry out. I love him! she wails.

At home, anything I say or do can make my mother angry. I've hurt her so badly that no hands will ever hold me again. My breath collects in my chest like a tight ball of yarn, and I weep and vomit, begging her forgiveness. When the house is asleep, I sneak around like a prisoner trying to find his way out.

The hand-model sits at the kitchen table with my father; they hold each other's hands. The old light bulbs make the place warm and yellowish, not like the harsh white neon halo above my mother. Whenever my father takes a business trip, he takes the hand-model with him. He waves goodbye to us and meets the hand-model down the street waiting in her coat, a kerchief over her hair, carrying a beige suitcase. He opens the car door for her but doesn't look at her, they don't need to look at each other. While he drives, she grips his arm and pulls closer to him, resting her cheek on his woolen sleeve.

My mother argues with my father. The sounds are muffled. From upstairs I hear her wails, which sound like my own cries. I see her skin pale under the neon light. My father says nothing, or he's

speaking so quietly I can't hear him. I know he's thinking about the hand-model--the way her fingers make a shelter for his trembling hands. One day he will move in with the hand-model permanently.

My father and the hand-model don't drive away together. They're down the street in her back yard under the arching oak trees drinking wine and dancing. My father is doing what looks like a flamenco, his hands raised above his head as if poised to set the banderillas in a bull's neck, his feet in shiny, pointed black boots. The hand-model is dressed in a sleeveless dress, her hands raised above her head too, clapping him on. He's sweating and clicking his heels louder and faster until they reach a rapid-fire tattoo. Then he stomps a few more absolute times, then silence. Her hands rest on his shoulders. They wipe his brow.

I get off my bed and walk downstairs. My mother sits at the kitchen table, studying her hands. Her face is in a shady darkness. I can hardly look at her. I ask her if she is OK. She doesn't hear, she's lost in thought. I sit down opposite her, but she doesn't notice me. Her skin is pale, as if she is already dead. Her hands are joined only to each other. She's thinking that my father will leave us for the hand-model. He has already left us for the hand-model.

I tell her that I'll never leave her, she can count on me. What I really want to do is to kill her and join my father and the hand-model down the street. But I can't kill her, my father can't kill her, the hand-model can't kill her. No one can.

Someday I will leave her. When the time comes, I'll kill her and my father too, or at least make them suffer. My father isn't worthy of the hand-model; only I am. I'll walk down the street to her house. Her hands will reach out from the doorway and pull me in. I'll hold her in my powerful, hairy hands. Her hands will settle on my shoulders. I'll look deeply into her eyes. We'll gaze at each other until her eyes become happier, her mouth softer and riper, her hands fluttering with expectation. I'll rescue her from her tower. It is only me she wants, only me she deserves.

