

A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA
WESTVIEW



Volume 12
Issue 3 Spring

Article 4

3-15-1993

Hands

Mark Spencer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

Recommended Citation

Spencer, Mark (1993) "Hands," *Westview*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 3 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol12/iss3/4>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.



HANDS

BY MARK SPENCER



about a week before she left him, Buck was looking at a catalogue he'd gotten in the mail from Pott's Prostheses, and he called to her: "I can start doin' some work if I get me one of these things." Buck worked the farm his parents had given him two years ago when they retired to Atlanta to be near his older brother, a rich architect with three kids.

"What things?" Crystal was at the table in the kitchen, fooling with a pile of photographs.

From where he sat in the living room he could see her. She was framed by the kitchen doorway. He was in his arm chair and had the TV on to watch "The Young and the Restless," one of his favorite soap operas. He'd started watching soap operas in the hospital and had kept all the nurses updated. He liked all the good-looking women on the shows. On "The Days of Our Lives," the women were all after a guy who wore an eye patch. One of those things that fascinated Buck was how characters who were supposed to be dead often turned out not to be. Even if you saw a dead body, it would usually turn out to be some long-lost twin who just happened to get into town the day the murderer struck or the accident occurred. Sometimes an actor quit for good, but his character was too important to kill off, so the show's writers would have him mutilated, then restored by plastic surgery. He would have no scars; he would lose nothing. He only talked different and looked different.

But the catalogue had come in the mail, and Buck wasn't paying attention to the TV. He said, "One of these things in this book. A hand."

"A what?"

He watched her. She didn't look up from her pictures. "One of those mechanical hands," he said. "Or something cheaper, like a hook."

The word "hook" seemed to get her attention. She looked up. Her mouth dropped open. She held a photograph in her fingers. "Buck, you hear me now. I don't ever want to hear you say something like that again. Are you trying to turn my stomach?" She laid the photograph down.

"But. . . ." He looked down at the catalogue on his lap. Smiling models showed off artificial hands and legs. Under the picture of a woman in a long

formal dress dancing with a man in a white tuxedo a caption said, "You can even dance!" Buck looked up and said, "I could—"

"I don't want to hear about hooks. God!"

He closed the catalogue. On the cover were a young couple on bicycles, a good-looking man with a mechanical leg and a sexy girl in shorts and a halter top. The girl wasn't missing any limbs. She had long blonde hair and a slim build, except for big, pointy breasts. She looked a lot like Crystal. Crystal could be a model, Buck thought. She'd been Miss Pumpkin Festival 1989.

Before his accident with the combine, Crystal often went around the house in flimsy, short nightgowns or in his tee shirts without a bra or panties underneath. Before the accident, she said she loved the way he looked and the things he did to her. Since he'd come home from the hospital, she had worn long, heavy robes and sweaters. Sitting at the kitchen table, looking at her photographs, she wore baggy denim overalls.

He got out of his arm chair and headed toward the kitchen. She didn't look up. Snapshots were arranged on the table in long straight rows and apparently in chronological order. The first one on the top row showed her as a baby barely old enough to sit up, wearing a frilly pink dress. Her hair was curly then. On the bottom row were several pictures she'd cut in half. Buck had known other girls who had also done that to photographs every time they broke up with a guy. In two of Crystal's pictures, there was a disembodied arm on her shoulder. In another, she was holding a disembodied hand in her own. In one, she wore a crown and her homecoming formal; a hand that came from nowhere was on her waist.

"Is that Scott Wilder's hand?" he asked.

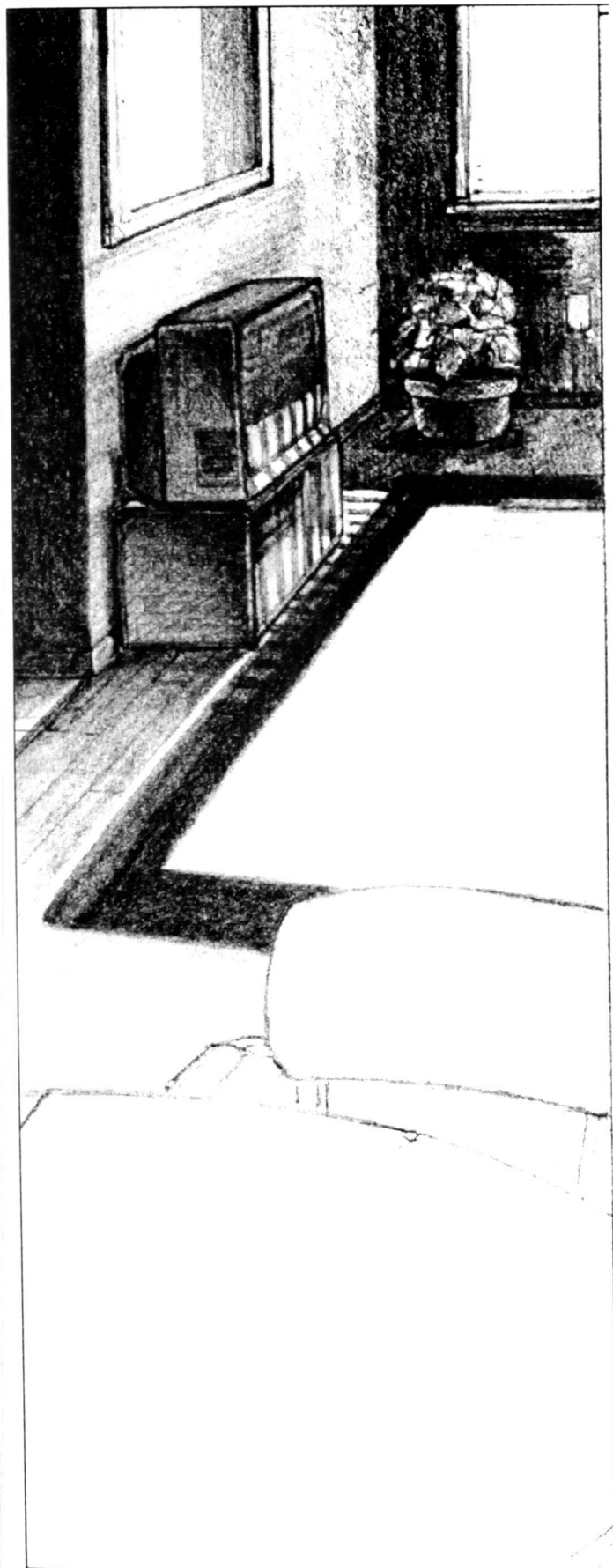
"Yeah. He was homecoming king, but he turned out to be a real loser. I'm sorry I wasted six months of my life on him."

Buck nodded. She had started dating Buck before she got around to breaking up with Wilder. She'd tell Wilder lies about being sick or going out with her girlfriends or having to visit her grandmother, and she and Buck would drive forty miles to Portsmouth to see a movie or eat at Dairy Queen or park behind Portsmouth Junior High. The next night, she'd be out with Wilder.

"Is that Scott Wilder's hand?"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN CRAWFORD

"This is nice," he said. "The story of our lives in pictures."



Wilder found out, and one morning Buck discovered his mailbox smashed and the mailbox post sawed up into stubby logs, evidently with a chain saw. At three in the morning, Buck went into West Union to Wilder's house, armed with a double-blade ax. Wilder's parents had just a little mailbox attached to the house next to the front door, so Buck looked around and decided to chop up a garden hose somebody had left strung across the front yard. Then he chopped down a young pear tree before lights came on in the house.

Looking at the rows of snapshots, Buck said, "Wilder was a pussy. I wish he had come around with that chain saw of his again. I'd have shown him the Ohio chain saw massacre."

Leaning toward Crystal, Buck made a noise like a chainsaw, trying to be entertaining.

"Will you stop it."

Buck found a picture of himself: sitting up on his tractor, a big grin on his face, his Massey Ferguson cap pushed back on his head, his hands huge on the steering wheel.

"This is nice," he said. "The story of our lives in pictures."

Then he made the mistake of patting the back of her shoulder with his stump, and she jumped up, mumbling something.

"What?" he asked.

She shook her head on her way to the sink full of dirty cups and silverware. The garbage can was full of pot-pie and TV-dinner containers. She reached for the spigot, then stopped and reached up to a cabinet and took down a glass.

"I like pictures," she said. "They make things stand still."

She opened the refrigerator and poured a Coke from a plastic two-liter bottle. She left the refrigerator door open, and Buck felt the chill. The refrigerator's motor kicked on, hummed.

He watched her lift the glass to her lips, watched her tip back her head, her long hair dipping below her waist, her smooth neck stretching, then her throat moving as she swallowed.

He noticed the beauty of her hand holding the glass. Her nails were pink with scarlet polka dots. She took a long drink, her eyes on the ceiling. ■