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Hand in Hand

by Richard Wilding

Quito, 1847

“I grew up in another language.” Yolanda dismounted me and fell back onto the bed. She was warm and soft, made not so much of flesh but of everything I adored. I was born to hold her in my arms, to feel her lips on mine. I had to cross half the world to find her, and yet here I am. “In the language I grew up with,” she continued, “men did not love women any more than they loved their horses or their wine. They would mistreat a woman as readily as they would love her. It was all the same to them. Love was an act that lasted 30 seconds. But you, Herc, you are teaching me a new language. But,” she looks serious, “I think you are keeping something from me.”

I turn my head on the pillow, brush her hair away from her eyes. “What?”

“I think you have been cheating me, Herc. In fact, I am sure of it.”

“Hmm?”

“You cannot in truth be English, Herc. Is not possible. A Colombian may mistreat his woman but at least he knows how a woman feels and how to make her feel. Englishmen do not know how women work. I have no idea how the English have children. Is it true that all the schools are for boys only? No wonder English know nothing of a woman. But you, my Herc, you know your way around me like you are a woman yourself. So you cannot be an Englishman. There. I have proved it.”

We laugh and kiss. Then I explore her once again, in case I missed anything.

Afterwards, we sit up in the bed and look out through the window. No breeze troubles the stillness of the room. I take hold of her hand, pale in the moonlight, and lift it to my face. It is my turn to kiss her fingers, one by one. Her fingers are short and strong, and though they are young their tips are already turning leathery from hard work. I turn her hand over. I notice a mole on her wrist covering her pulse which I hadn't seen before. There is so much more to learn about Yolanda. I trace the lines on her palm. "This," I tell her, "is your life line." I track it with my finger tip around the soft cushioning at the base of her thumb. "And this," I say, "is your head line. See here, how it curves? That says you are a woman of passion."

"You need a line on my hand to tell you this?" she asks.

"And see, your life line and your head line do not touch. See? Here?"

"Means I'm going to die tonight?" She looks mock worried.

"Means your life will be one of adventure, Yolanda. It says you are restless and will not be tied down, you will not settle."

"I am a wild horse," she says, and shakes her long, blond mane.