

THOSE HANDS

SHELBY KITTRELL

Only by judging the lines in his hands could one surmise the vitality of his youth. Those hands that once held hand grenades could no longer hold an apple. Those hands once held tight to the woman he loved. That same woman now cares for him as a child rather than a lover. Those hands miss the strength they once possessed, as well as the should be effortless ability to caress the spine of a book.

Once thick and calloused from working night and day in the fields, those hands now trembled uncontrollably, the skin translucent and shriveled, veins visible beneath the surface. Those veins used to swell in the heat of the afternoon sun, when he carelessly ran amongst the olive orchards, racing the sunset and daring his body to use every last breath. Those orchard rows now resembled the pattern on the blanket that was folded neatly over his motionless legs.

They say life is worth living. To him, life had been lived. And though he was still conscious, little remained of his existence. His hands told him this everyday, though his children told him otherwise. They told him he should be grateful, he wanted to tell them he was not. Only his wife could look into his gaze and understand the suffering he endured. She had held those hands for so many years. And only she wished that he would soon pass, for it was she who loved those hands the most.

FIRST IN FLORIDA

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Yield to the palmetto bugs and grasshoppers. Semi trucks and smog pass by on hot asphalt. Too much methane in the brain alters perceptions so that objects in the mirror are closer than they appear. Florida is open for business. Fiddler crabs demand respect, claws raised high. Myna birds stuck on repeat, scold “radio-radio-radio” and can only be silenced with homemade corn syrup. High glucose and high spirits give the jitters. Open 24 hours a day. Take a ride on the airboat or the ambulance, both are equally thrilling. Boiled peanuts keep hands occupied. There’s no substitute for eating high on the hog. Portalets signify festivity and funnel cakes. We collide in our inflatable donuts and drink tainted lemonade. No camping in the median, unless you’re feeling frisky. In that case, unfold the rebel flag and stand your ground. Everything looks better from behind.