

Thick Gnat Hands

By

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Cast of Characters

<u>Tom</u> :	Dialysis patient, a first timer
<u>Spencer</u> :	Dialysis patient, a pro

Scene

a stark white hospital room

Time

now

A stark white hospital room. Two men sit side by side in oversized, slightly reclining chairs. They are flanked by two large white machines, which make gentle whirring noises and have cords that connect to each man's inner arm near the elbow. Tom reads a book, while Spencer, the obvious sicker man of the two, has his eyes closed and is engaged in a deep breathing exercise. After a few moments, Spencer opens his eyes and smiles at Tom. Tom feels his gaze and looks up.

SPENCER

Did you know that profound nourishment is available to us when we slow down and get in touch with our in-breath and our out-breath?

Beat.

TOM

Huh?

SPENCER

I'm happy to lead you through some breath-work if you like.

TOM

I'm good, thanks.

SPENCER

Ok.

Beat.

Spencer. First time?

TOM

Uh, yeah. First time.

Tom returns to his book.

SPENCER

Whaddoo I call ya, friend?

TOM

Sorry?

SPENCER

Gotta name?

TOM

Tom.

SPENCER

(excited)
Short for Tomalin?

TOM

Uh... No. Thomas, actually.

SPENCER

Oh that's beautiful. Well congrats on the first day of the rest of your life, Tom! If you need anything, let me know. I've been doing this dialysis thing for quite some time now, so if you have any questions about the process, or if you just want to bounce some thoughts off a fellow human being who's walking a path similar to yours, I am 100% here... fully present.... and wildly open to the gift of sharing this experience with you.

Beat.

TOM

Umm.....

SPENCER

(harmonizing with Tom's "um").
Ahhhhhhhh.....

Beat.

TOM

What are you doing?

SPENCER

Harmonizing. Isn't that a delicious feeling, creating a chord with someone?

TOM

Um....

SPENCER

(harmonizing again)
Ahhhh....

Beat.

Well? Isn't it?

TOM

I guess I've - I've never really thought about it before, Sanford.

SPENCER

Spencer.

TOM

Right. Sorry.

SPENCER

Don't be. Sanford is delightful. Well, think about it now, Tom. After all, the time is always and only ever now.

Spencer scratches his skin fiercely and smiles.

TOM

I'm sorry - what... am I thinking about?

Spencer continues to scratch and smile. Tom gets noticeably uncomfortable.

Umm...

SPENCER

(harmonizing a third time)

Ahhhhh.....

TOM

Oh, that! Yeah no, I hate that. Please stop.

SPENCER

Sure thing! I guess harmonizing isn't a crucial step on your path.

TOM

Guess not.

Beat. Spencer scratches his skin a more intensely. Tom is uncomfortable.

Ok. I think I'm gonna read my book now.

SPENCER

Great Tom! Enjoy it!

TOM

Ok. Bye.

Tom reads.

SPENCER

Whatcha reading by the way? Fiction, Non-fiction? Humor-book? Whatcha got Tom?

TOM

(sighing)

Non-fiction.

SPENCER

Come on big guy, gimme the skinny!

TOM

Please don't call me big guy.

SPENCER

Just hold it up so I can see the cover art maybe?

Tom reluctantly holds up his book.

"Forever in Chains: The Tragic History of the Congo."
Yikes. You sure you wanna fill your awareness with that?

TOM

Yes. Yes, my awareness would love nothing more at this moment.

SPENCER

Ya sure? I've just learned that when one is in the process of healing it's best to surround one's self with literature that feels good and - from what I understand - there's some pretty negative energy comin' outta that Congo.

Quick beat.

Am I right? Ooo, quick! Ask me what I'm reading!

TOM

I don't want to.

SPENCER

Come on big guy, ask me!

TOM

Don't call me big guy!

SPENCER

Ask me!

TOM

WHAT ARE YOU READING!!?

SPENCER

(gently)

You don't have to yell to get your needs met, Tom. Keep in mind we're in a hospital. People are trying to heeeeeal. To answer your question though, this is what I'm reading!

Spencer proudly presents his book.

TOM

"Breathe. You are Alive." By Thick Gnat Hand.

SPENCER

Oh that's delightful! Oh, I just love that!

Spencer enjoys a good chuckle.

TOM

What's so funny?

SPENCER

His name is pronounced "Tick - Knot - Hahn," Tom. But I think "Thick Gnat Hand" is just delightful. You're delightful. Do you know that Tom, do you know how delightful you are?

TOM

Yeah. I'm a hoot.

SPENCER

(still laughing)

I agree! "Thick Gnat Hand..."

TOM

Listen, I don't mean to be rude but-

SPENCER

You wanna get back to your nice Congo book.

Quick beat while Spencer wiggles his fingers and smiles.

TOM

Did you just do "spirit fingers" while referencing the Congo?

SPENCER

No. I like that though, the concept of spirit fingers! But no, swelling and tingling is a side effect of the dialysis. Just gotta shake out my 'ol... "thick gnat hands" from time to time.

Quick beat.

See what I did there?

TOM

Comic gold.

SPENCER

Thanks. Go on Tom. Read, read!

TOM

Thanks.

They read their respective books in silence for a few moments. Suddenly, Spencer's phone rings. It's loud. His ring tone, REM's "Losing my Religion," blares throughout the hospital room.

SPENCER

(loud whisper)

I'm so sorry, but I need to take this.

TOM

Go for it, "big guy."

SPENCER

Thanks for the term of endearment, Tom!

TOM

It wasn't exactly a-

Spencer begins singing and dancing in a very serious fashion, ala Michael Stipe in the "Losing My Religion" music video.

SPENCER

(singing)

"Ohhhhh Life. It's bigger. It's bigger than you. And you are not me. The lengths that I will go to. The distance in your eyes-"

TOM

Should you be doing that?

SPENCER

(still singing)

"Oh no, I've said toooooo much. I set it up."

TOM

Are you gonna answer that or just sing and dance?

SPENCER

(a bit out of breath)

Just sing and dance!

TOM

Terrific.

During the next verse, Spencer starts doing a vigorous forearm-clapping move he learned from the video.

SPENCER

(singing)
"I thought that I heard you laughing..."

TOM

Whoa whoa whoa-

SPENCER

(singing)
I thought that I heard you sing..."

TOM

You're pulling your IV-

Spencer continues to dance

SPENCER

(singing)
"I. Think I Thought I Saw. You. Try. Every-"

The phone stops ringing.

SPENCER

(disappointed)
Went to message.

TOM

Bummer.

*Spencer sits back down, a drop of blood trickling
down his arm.*

SPENCER

So what was I saying?

TOM

Your arm is bleeding.

Spencer adjust his IV.

SPENCER

(shrugging)
Just some minor spillage. Stipe-ing is worth it, Tom.
Worth it every single time.

TOM

..."Stipe-ing?"

SPENCER

The way Michael Stipe grooves in the "Losing My
Religion" video???? Have you not seen it????

TOM

Ummmm....

SPENCER

(harmonizing)

Ahhhhh.... A teaching moment. I love it. Ok.
"Stipe-ing"- I coined the phrase- is when the life
force pulses through you so profoundly that you just
have to...

*Spencer loses himself in another quick session of
forearm clapping.*

TOM

(referring to the IV)

Whoa!!

*More blood trickles down Spencer's arm. He blots
it and adjust his IV again.*

SPENCER

(looking at his arm)

Oops. Yeah. Maybe I should simmer down a bit.

TOM

Maybe.

SPENCER

That's just so hard to do isn't it? When you just want
to celebrate at Every. Single. Second. Am I right?

TOM

Yeah I'm really enjoying this exciting juncture in my
life.

SPENCER

(with spirit fingers)

That's the spirit, Tom! Good for you!

*Spencer sits down and returns to his book. Tom
watches him a moment.*

TOM

Your happiness is-

SPENCER

Contagious?

TOM

Disconcerting. It's-

SPENCER

Inspiring?

TOM

Calculated. I'm not buying it.

SPENCER

Well good! 'Cause I'm not selling it! It's mine mine mine!

Spencer hugs himself and has a laugh.

TOM

(under his breath)

Fuckin freak.

SPENCER

Sorry, didn't catch that, Tom?

TOM

I called you a freak. You are a freak! And this faux spiritual thing you do-?

SPENCER

There's nothing faux about me, friend. Except for my toupee. Kidding. I'm lucky to have naturally luxurious hair.

TOM

-it's insulting! There are sick people in this place. There are scared people in this place-

SPENCER

Like you?

TOM

-And, and, and, your moronic attempts to put a positive spin on everything is just depressing. There's nothing "delightful" about what's happening to you. There's nothing "delicious" about this. Look at you.

Spencer is scratching again.

You're dying!

SPENCER

Sure, my body is. But me? Meeeee? No, I can never die. Neither can you. Not the real you anyway. The expansive you. Uh uh, big guy, that's just impossible.

Beat.

Can I ask you a question?

TOM

No.

SPENCER

Do you remember the time before you came forth into your physical body? You know, when you were pure stardust?

Beat.

TOM

Hmmm. Gosh. That's going back a few, so.... no. Unfortunately, no Spencer, I'm having a bit of a hard time remembering my stardust days!

SPENCER

And that's precisely why you're in pain.

Beat.

TOM

That's why I'm in pain.

SPENCER

Yes.

Beat.

TOM

Well thank you for clearing that up for me! Here I was thinking I was "in pain" because my fucking kidneys are shutting down. I thought I was "in pain" because I now have to spend three hours a day three days a week attached to a fucking machine!

SPENCER

Nope. You're in pain because you've forgotten how perfect you are.

Beat.

You're in pain because you're resistant.

Beat.

You're in pain because you don't love yourself.

Beat.

Have you seen the baby photo I keep on my refrigerator?

TOM

I met you five minutes ago. When would I have had the honor of viewing your appliances?

SPENCER

Right. Well, I keep one of my baby photos on my refrigerator. Started rooting through old photos when I got my diagnosis- I guess people do things like that? Anyway, I found this picture that just... knocked me out. I'm three days old. Yeah, it says August 23rd on the back. I'm just home from the hospital and my mom's holding me out on our back porch. My little arms are over my head like this-

TOM

You're about to tear your arm up again. Not that it matters, since you're immortal and all.

SPENCER

(lowering his arms)

Yeah, I should be more careful though. Thanks for caring Tom.

TOM

I didn't say I -- You're welcome.

SPENCER

So they're up there - my arms - and my little baby chest is there. My little baby head is kinda tossed back and tilted to one side, my eyes closed. I look so...trusting. And....new. And... perfect.

Beat.

There was something about that picture. Something shifted in me when I looked at it, and I knew I could never be mean to myself again.

Quick beat.

You ever mean to yourself, Tom?

A beat. Tom doesn't answer.

So now - every morning - I look at that picture and I kiss that baby. I do. Right on his face. I kiss my own little pint-sized baby face, and I tell myself - outloud - "you're still perfect." Even now. Especially now.

TOM

Why are you telling me this?

SPENCER

"You're still perfect."

TOM

(getting teary)

Shut up.

SPENCER

You are.

TOM

No really. I'm begging you. I've needed you to shut up for so long now.

Beat. Tom turns away from him.

SPENCER

Sure, Tom. I can do that. I can shut up.

Quick beat.

I'll just be over here breathing if you need me.

Beat while Spencer gets settled.

In through the nose...

Spencer breathes in.

And out through the nose...

Spencer breathes out.

In through the nose...

Spencer breathes in. Tom turns to watch him.

And out through the nose...

Spencer breathes out.

Tom closes his eyes and matches Spencer's breathing.

In through the nose...

They both inhale.

And out through the nose...

They exhale.

Lights out.