

The Still Hand

By: Austin Huibers



## Chapter 1 - The Pill

The commercial comes on between the evening news and the weather. Mara doesn't usually watch television. She doesn't care about the anchors or the ticker running along the bottom. But tonight, she is alone, and the apartment is quiet.

Soft piano music drifts from the speakers. Sunlight, or something like it, spills across the kitchen counter. A woman-older, calm, careful-tilts her hand toward the light, fingers tracing the lines of her palm. Not nervously, not curiously. Methodically. Reverently.

"When the world feels heavy... find Clarity." The voice is measured, intimate, almost whispering.

Mara sips her tea. She lets the warmth anchor her. She watches the hand, the way it moves, the way the woman's eyes linger. She doesn't know why, but it feels familiar. Like a memory she can't place.

By Monday, Mara notices small changes at school. Teachers talking quietly in the lounge. A bottle of Clarity on each desk: orange, precise, neat, a promise of focus and calm. Everyone is talking about it. Excited, polite. Whispering about relief.

At lunch, Janine tells a story about her toddler, who threw a tantrum over a misplaced sippy cup. She is animated, laughing, gesturing. Then she stops. The words falter. Her gaze drops to her open palm on the table. Fingers slightly curled, relaxed. Lips parted, barely moving.

Mara blinks.

Seconds pass. Janine does not move. Does not blink. Then, just as quietly, she shakes her head and continues, picking up the story mid-sentence as if the pause had never existed.

Mara laughs softly, shaking her head. Funny, she thinks. Odd, but harmless.

Then it happens again. Later, another teacher pauses mid-email, drops their gaze to their hands. The gesture is slight, but the familiarity makes Mara's stomach twist. It is not a one-time quirk. It is a rhythm. A pattern.

On her walk home, the streets are dim, the sky bruised and overcast. She notices her own hands resting on her coat pockets. Pale, veined, creased. The lines look sharper tonight, longer, deeper than she remembers. She studies them, tilts them toward the muted streetlights, and for a moment imagines something moving beneath the skin.

A tremor runs through her chest. She shakes her hands quickly, laughs quietly to herself. Ridiculous. Just nerves.

The apartment smells faintly of tea and old wood. Mara places her hands on the table, studying the lines again, just for a moment longer than necessary. Something about them feels... wrong.

She knows she will see it again tomorrow.

And the next day.

And then she will notice the world has changed in subtle ways, and she is the only one paying attention.

## Chapter 2 - The Quirk

By the end of the week, Mara notices it everywhere.

On the train, a man sits across from her, shoulders hunched, hand raised slightly before his face. He doesn't read, doesn't scroll a phone. He simply stares, fingers flexing minutely, as if tracing invisible patterns in the air above his palm. The rhythmic motion is hypnotic. She feels a shiver, like the world has shifted and she's the only one awake.

At school, the children mimic it. A boy raises his hand to ask a question, then freezes, staring at the other palm as if it holds the answer. The teacher's voice drifts over him, distant, unheeded. Two girls lean shoulder to shoulder in the hallway, palms hovering, murmuring softly. It is not conversation. Not speech. It is a quiet communion.

At home, she sees it in herself. She tilts her hand toward the dim light of the apartment, fingers splayed. The lines and creases ripple in her mind's eye, deeper, darker than before. Her thumb twitches involuntarily, tracing a path over her palm. She jerks it back. Laughs. Nonsense.

At dinner, her sister, Rachel, rests her hand on the table. Halfway through a story, she stops, eyes slipping downward, fingers trembling slightly.

Mara tries to speak over it. "Rachel, look at me."

Her sister glances up, startled for a moment, and then her gaze falls back. "I'm fine," she says. But Mara knows she isn't. She can see the pull. The quiet gravity dragging her sister inward, toward herself.

The pattern grows in the streets, too. Mara walks through the park one afternoon. Children run, some laughing, but most stand still for moments at a time, palms raised, faces blank. Adults sit on benches, coffee cups in hand, eyes fixed on their own lines. Not a screen. Not a page. Their own hands.

The quiet is contagious. Mara feels herself drawn toward it, fingers flexing unconsciously, the rhythm beckoning. She shakes her hands, walking faster, wanting the sensation to pass, but it does not.

At night, she dreams of it. Fingers stretching, palms opening, lines glowing faintly in darkness. Something murmuring she cannot understand. She wakes with her hand outstretched in bed, staring at her own palm, trying to remember the dream.

By the end of the week, she realizes-this is not going to stop.

It is everywhere.

It is only beginning.

## Chapter 3 - The Spread

By Monday, the advertisements appear everywhere. Billboards along the freeway: “*Be Here Now. Be With Yourself. Clarity.*” Neon signs in shop windows echo the same message, soft and unassuming, as if suggesting something benign, almost virtuous. Mara drives past them, hands tight on the steering wheel, stomach turning.

The streets are quieter than usual. Fewer phones in hands, fewer voices raised. Instead, a pale, silent rhythm has taken hold: palms lifted, fingers slightly curled, eyes fixed. Children on the sidewalks glance at their own hands mid-step. A man hunches over a bench, hands raised, tracing invisible lines above his palms. He doesn’t notice Mara’s car idling slowly nearby.

At school, the pattern grows. Teachers lean back in chairs, gaze fixed downward. Students mimic them instinctively, the gesture now part of the classroom’s rhythm. No one talks. The usual chatter, the laughter, the chaos—it’s all muted. Mara walks between desks like a ghost, heart thudding, trying to pull a student’s attention. Fingers twitching involuntarily.

Even at dinner, Mara sees it at home. Rachel pours wine, hand hovering just above the bottle. Conversation falters mid-sentence; her gaze slips downward. Mara shakes her head.

“They’re fine,” Rachel says, voice flat, eyes still moving along the lines of her palm.

Mara doesn’t argue. She doesn’t know how.

At the grocery store, she notices entire aisles of people-shopping lists in one hand, the other raised toward themselves. Checking. Watching. Absorbing something no one else sees. She walks past, pretending to reach for produce, feeling her own hand twitch with the strange rhythm.

By evening, Mara feels it inescapably in her apartment. Hands resting on the table, she traces the lines absentmindedly, drawn to the faint pull. The edges of her vision seem to flicker when she looks away. Shadows linger longer. Sounds are muted, distant. The world is subtly tilted, and she is the only one aware.

At night, she lies awake, listening. Her own fingers twitch under the covers. The quiet of the apartment is thick, heavy, almost alive. She keeps her hand tucked against her chest, willing herself to stop, willing herself to remember that it is just a habit.

But the pull is there.

And she knows it will not stop.

## Chapter 4 - The Distance

By Wednesday, Mara begins to notice the silence everywhere.

At the bakery, the clerk doesn't meet her eyes. Her hands hover above the counter, fingers flexing slowly, tracing the invisible lines of her palm. Mara stares, unsure if she's imagining it, but then notices the other customers-three of them, each clutching a loaf of bread, each glancing down at their own hands mid-conversation, mouths moving in empty syllables. She doesn't hear the words. Only the quiet hum of fluorescent lights overhead and the faint scrape of her own shoes against the linoleum.

On the bus, a man two rows ahead sits upright, hands hovering before his face. His fingers twitch like tiny, deliberate dancers. A child beside him mirrors the motion, small hands curling and flexing above her lap. Mara shifts in her seat, uneasy, wishing she could avert her eyes but feeling drawn toward the strange, meticulous movement.

At school, the distance is more pronounced. Her students sit in neat rows, hands poised as if ready to read the future from their palms. One girl raises her hand, then freezes, staring at the lines with a strange, serene intensity. The boy next to her does the same. Mara clears her throat, voice louder than she intends, but the sound seems swallowed by the room. Their eyes remain fixed, unmoving. Their silence is absolute.

Even the teachers have changed. The faculty lounge is quieter, the usual chatter replaced by the soft, rhythmic hum of palms moving against themselves. Janine, Mara notices, now seems to speak only with one hand cupped over the other, glancing down mid-sentence, and then resuming as though nothing happened. She looks up at Mara and smiles briefly, then returns to her hand.

At home, the shift is unbearable. Rachel sets her glass of wine down with a soft clink, fingers hovering over her palm. Conversation dies mid-word. Mara tries to pull her sister into the room's reality, gestures, words, raised voice, anything, but the pull of her own hands is too strong. Rachel doesn't see her. Not really.

Mara notices it most at night. Sitting alone, she traces the lines of her own palms, lingering on the tiny creases and folds. A strange rhythm forms under her fingers, subtle, almost hypnotic. She presses her thumb into the center of her palm. A faint warmth blooms. She jerks back, startled, but can't stop staring. She wonders how long she's been like this, tracing, following the invisible patterns.

Outside, the world mirrors her private discomfort. In the park, children play, but they pause frequently to hold hands in the light, staring at them like something sacred. Couples sit together on benches, hands intertwined, yet each glance downward, as if a secret exists only there. Mara walks among them, feeling disconnected, like a shadow moving through a city of ghosts.

Her own family begins to shift in the same way. Her mother, on a phone call, gestures mid-sentence, hand raised, curling fingers over lines Mara suddenly notices glow faintly in dim light. Even her father, usually gruff and impatient, traces invisible paths over his palm while reading a newspaper, eyes distant.

Mara's loneliness grows. She tries to fill it with sound: music, podcasts, the television on low. Nothing helps. Even the voices are muted now, replaced by the faint, pervasive rhythm of hands moving against themselves. She feels it creeping into her own movements, her own thoughts. At dinner, she catches herself unconsciously raising her hand to study the lines, tracing them absentmindedly with a finger, and quickly jerks it down, embarrassed, unsettled.

Sleep offers no escape. She dreams of hands: endless, infinite, palms opening toward her, fingers curling, twisting, beckoning. She wakes with her own hand outstretched in bed, staring, tracing, memorizing the familiar folds and ridges. The pull is insistent, hypnotic. She shakes it off, but the sensation lingers, clinging to her skin like a second heartbeat.

By the end of the week, Mara realizes the pattern is complete. The world has shifted. People are no longer present in ordinary ways. They are present only in their hands, tracing, watching, following. Conversation is sparse. Eye contact rare. Even laughter is interrupted, swallowed by the pull of the palms.

And Mara feels herself beginning to follow.

Even now, she wonders how long she will resist.

## Chapter 5 - The Classroom

Monday morning arrives with gray light filtering through the classroom windows. Mara stands at the threshold, coat slung over one arm, bag dangling at her side. She notices it immediately: twenty small hands hovering in front of twenty small faces, perfectly still. The hum of fluorescent lights overhead buzzes faintly, masking the absence of conversation.

No one looks up.

She clears her throat. "Good morning," she says, voice careful, precise. "Let's start."

A pause. She scans the rows: hands raised, fingers curled lightly. The pupils' eyes flicker along the creases of their palms. One boy shifts slightly, but his gaze doesn't leave his hand. A girl tilts her head, tracing invisible patterns over her own skin.

Mara's chest tightens. She steps forward, gently tapping a desk. "Can anyone tell me what page we're on?"

A faint shuffle. Nothing more. Their silence is absolute. She wonders if they can hear her at all.

She walks between the rows, voice rising, repeating instructions. Still, nothing. Fingers twitch, palms flex, but no one speaks. The small movements are precise, hypnotic, almost reverent. She feels the pull, the quiet insistence of the gesture. Even as she moves among them, trying to draw their attention, her own fingers twitch against her palm. She jerks them down, embarrassed, unsettled.

At the back of the classroom, Janine sits in her usual chair, coffee untouched. Her hand hovers above her desk. Mara notices the subtle rhythm: thumb tracing a shallow line, fingers curling in time, almost imperceptible. Janine glances up briefly, smiles faintly, then returns to her palm.

The room is unnervingly quiet. The walls, the shelves, the posters-everything seems sharper, closer, like the air itself has thickened. Mara feels trapped in a bubble of observation, suspended.

She kneels beside a student. "Look at me," she whispers, soft but urgent. The boy's eyes flicker upward, then down again, as if forgetting what she asked the instant the words leave her lips. She places her hand gently on his desk, then pulls back. He doesn't move, doesn't speak, only continues tracing the invisible patterns across his own palm.

The lesson dissolves around her. Pages remain unopened. Markers sit dry. Mara walks to the window, gazing at the playground outside. Children scatter across the yard, but even there, a strange rhythm persists: palms lifted, fingers twitching, lines watched, traced, worshiped.

She returns to the rows of students. Her throat aches from speaking. Her arms ache from gesturing. Her own hand trembles. She notices herself tracing a faint line along her palm with her thumb. She jerks it back instinctively, heart hammering. She is not immune.

By the end of the hour, Mara realizes the truth. The classroom is no longer a room for learning. It is a theater of silent devotion to something unseen. The students are alive, and yet absent. They are present, and yet gone.

She sits at her desk, alone, fingers flexing against her palm, wishing she could shut her eyes and wake in a world where this hadn't happened.

But she knows she cannot.

The quiet, the obsession, the hands-they are everywhere now.

And she is only beginning to understand how deep it runs.

## Chapter 6 - The Justification

By midweek, Mara feels the world slipping beneath her.

At the grocery store, she watches a mother push a cart, her child beside her, hands lifted almost instinctively, tracing faint lines in the air above their palms. Mara sees the child's brow furrow slightly, tongue brushing the corner of their mouth, as if concentrating on something invisible. The mother glances down briefly, adjusting her own fingers. Then they walk past her, quiet, oblivious to Mara's presence.

She walks through the produce section, scanning the shelves, trying to find something ordinary: apples, oranges, potatoes. Even the food seems muted. People's hands hover as they pick up tomatoes, trace the curve of a squash, curl over a bundle of carrots, not inspecting, but... something else. Something deeper.

Mara's own fingers twitch. She presses her thumb into her palm, feels the lines beneath her skin. Warmth. Movement. She jerks it back. Embarrassed, unsettled. She can feel it now, in herself. The pull. The quiet insistence.

At home, the shift is more pronounced. Rachel, her sister, pours wine mid-conversation, hand hovering above the bottle. Mid-sentence, her gaze drifts downward. Mara gestures toward her sister's face. "Look at me."

Rachel glances up, startled. "I'm looking," she says softly. But her eyes drift again, tracing lines Mara cannot name. Mara feels the weight of it, the subtle gravity of the gesture. Even here, in her own home, the pull is everywhere.

Her parents have changed too. At Sunday lunch, her father sits across the table, newspaper open, fingers hovering above the page. Her mother, teacup in hand, flexes her thumb along faint, invisible creases on her palm. Conversation dies mid-word, replaced by the soft, insistent rhythm of hands moving against themselves. Mara tries to fill the gaps, voice louder than she intends, but the words bounce back like they're hitting glass.

She walks the streets after dinner. The city has grown quieter. Shop windows glow, but the people inside move differently. Clerks, shoppers, couples, children-all hands raised, tracing, studying, following something invisible. Even laughter, when it occurs, cuts off mid-note as if the hands demand attention.

Mara stops at a crosswalk, watching. A man hunches over a bench, fingers flexing lightly above his palm. Two teenagers walk past him, mirroring the motion, wrists twitching in perfect rhythm. A dog barks in the distance. The sound is sharp, discordant, and the humans barely register it.

Her stomach knots. She walks faster, weaving through the silent congregation, but she feels herself drawn to it. Her own fingers curl involuntarily, tracing faint lines along her palms. She jerks them away, ashamed, frightened.

At night, she dreams again. Endless hands stretch toward her, palms opening, fingers curling, beckoning. She wakes with her own hand outstretched, tracing lines she cannot forget. The pull is insistent, hypnotic.

She tries to justify it. The commercials, the prescriptions, the teachers, the children-they all say it is for clarity, calm, focus. She tells herself it is harmless. Helpful. Rational.

But she knows better.

The pull is growing. The obsession is everywhere. People no longer look at each other. They are present, but absent. Alive, but somewhere else.

And Mara feels herself slipping, too.

## Chapter 7 – End of Week

By Thursday, Mara can feel it everywhere she goes.

She calls her best friend, Daniel, mid-morning. His phone rings twice, then voicemail. She leaves a trembling message:

“Dan... it’s happening everywhere. Please, just answer.”

Hours later, still no reply.

At the coffee shop, she scans the room. The barista’s hands hover above the register buttons, flexing gently, thumb tracing faint lines on her palm. The patrons sit with cups in hand, eyes down, fingers twitching. A man reads a newspaper, both hands suspended above the page, tracing the invisible. Mara wants to speak, to shake someone into awareness, but she knows-no one will look up.

She walks the streets, past shop windows. Couples sit together on benches, each with one hand raised, tracing the lines that seem to pulse faintly beneath their skin. Children skip along the sidewalk, pausing mid-step to curl fingers above their palms, gaze intense, distant.

She reaches Daniel’s apartment building. Keys tremble in her hand as she fumbles with the lock. The door is unlocked. She pushes it open slowly, the faint smell of incense and coffee drifting from inside.

Daniel sits in the corner of his living room. Chair angled toward the fading light. His hand hovers in his lap, fingers tracing unseen lines. His eyes are distant, soft, but fixed.

“Dan,” Mara whispers.

No response.

She steps closer. The floor creaks. He glances at her briefly, and then his eyes drift down again.

“There’s something in it,” he says softly, voice low, almost afraid. “If you look long enough... it talks back.”

Mara freezes. “What... what do you mean?”

He shrugs, as if the answer is too heavy to carry. “It’s quiet. Gentle. But it pulls. Once you notice it, you can’t stop. I tried... I tried to ignore it. But it doesn’t let you.”

Mara’s chest tightens. Her fingers twitch involuntarily. She clenches her fists. “Dan... don’t do this. Don’t let it take you.”

He doesn’t move. Doesn’t blink. Doesn’t speak again. Just the soft, precise movement of his fingers, tracing the invisible lines on his palm. The room feels smaller, heavier, as if the walls themselves are pressing inward.

She stumbles back, heart racing, almost running. The streets outside feel sharper now, more alien. People pass by, all tracing, all watching, all absorbed. The world has shifted, and she is suddenly alone in its periphery.

Back at home, her own hands betray her. Sitting at the kitchen table, she flexes her fingers, tracing the faint lines of her palms. She jerks them back, startled. But the pull is there, subtle, insistent. Even now, even here, in the solitude she hoped would protect her, it waits.

Mara realizes she is not immune. Resistance is fleeting. Awareness is not enough. The fracture is not just in society—it is inside her.

Sleep offers no respite. She dreams of Daniel, of children, of strangers in the street, hands reaching toward her, beckoning. Endless palms, endless lines, endless pull. She wakes with her hand outstretched, tracing the ridges, memorizing, terrified, hypnotized.

By the end of the day, Mara understands the truth: the fracture is complete. She is a witness, and a participant, and there is no escape.

And yet... she refuses to look down entirely.

## Chapter 8 - The Silence

The city feels hollow.

By Friday, Mara notices it the moment she steps outside. The streets are full of people, but there is no sound-no laughter, no shouts, no conversation. Only the faint hum of engines, the occasional creak of a bicycle, and the soft, rhythmic movement of hands.

She walks past the café where she usually stops for a latte. The barista stands behind the counter, fingers hovering over the espresso machine, tracing invisible lines in the air. Customers sit at tables, each palm raised, eyes fixed, absorbed. No one notices her. No one speaks.

Mara's stomach twists. Her own hands tremble, curling instinctively toward her own palms. She jerks them down, embarrassed, unsettled. She moves faster, weaving through the silent congregation. Every step feels heavy, every face she passes, a reminder of what has changed.

At the park, children are still at play, but only in brief bursts. Most stand frozen for long stretches, palms raised, tracing, flexing, watching. One boy spins slowly, eyes locked on the lines of his hand. A girl nearby mimics the motion, her laughter dying in her throat mid-note.

She tries to speak to them. "Hey, look at me!" Her voice echoes unnaturally in the quiet. No response. They are gone, even as they stand before her.

Back on the streets, Mara sees the pattern everywhere. Office workers on their lunch break, hands hovering above sandwiches, fingers tracing the invisible. Couples sit on benches, one hand intertwined, the other raised, studying lines that seem to pulse faintly beneath their skin. Even the homeless man by the subway entrance lifts his calloused hand, eyes focused on some private map etched only for him.

Mara's apartment offers no sanctuary. She closes the door behind her and leans against it, heart pounding, trying to breathe. Her hands betray her. Fingers twitch against her palms, tracing faint lines, pressing into the ridges. She jerks them away, but the pull is insistent, hypnotic.

Rachel sits across from her, untouched wine, eyes down. "It's fine," she says softly, almost rehearsed. But her hand remains suspended, flexing lightly, thumb tracing a faint curve. Mara knows better. Rachel is not fine. She is absorbed, entranced.

Dinner is silent. Even the dog seems to sense the change, curling into a ball, eyes alert, watching. Mara eats mechanically, chewing slowly, observing the subtle rise and fall of Rachel's hand. She wants to speak, to break the pattern, to drag her sister out of it, but she feels the futility in her chest. Resistance is fading. Awareness is fragile.

At night, the city beyond the window is a panorama of hands. Apartment lights flicker on. Silhouettes raise palms, tracing lines, bending fingers, curling thumbs. Shadows ripple like water. The streets are still. No one talks. No one looks up.

Mara lies in bed, trembling. Her own fingers trace her palms again, memorizing the familiar lines, memorizing herself. She jerks them back. Closes her eyes. Tries to force herself to sleep.

But even in darkness, she feels it. The quiet pull. The endless rhythm. The obsession waiting just below the surface, patient, insistent.

By the end of the week, she knows the truth: the silence is not empty. It is full. Full of devotion. Full of surrender. Full of something she cannot name.

And she is beginning to wonder—how long can she resist before she too becomes part of it?

## Chapter 9 - The Mirror

Saturday morning arrives gray and heavy. Mara wakes to the faint hum of the city outside her window, a soft rhythm she has come to know too well. She lies in bed, tracing the lines of her own palm in the dim light. The grooves feel sharper today, the ridges deeper, almost alive under her fingertips.

She hesitates, then lifts her hand closer, squinting at the faint shadows of her veins beneath her skin. She watches herself, long and carefully, as if trying to memorize her own reflection. Her thumb traces a line she has never noticed before. The motion is subtle, hypnotic. She jerks her hand back, heart hammering, but the pull remains, quiet and insistent.

By mid-morning, Mara ventures out. The streets are silent, filled with people whose hands move in the slow, deliberate rhythm she has come to know. Office workers on benches, fingers raised. Children in the park, hands hovering, tracing. Even the pigeons seem to pause mid-step, as if aware of the change.

She passes a shop window and stops. The glass reflects her own face. She studies herself, pale and tense, hair falling in loose strands over her forehead. Then she notices her hands - raised, curling slightly, fingers flexing almost unconsciously. She jerks them down.

But the reflection lies. She knows it. She knows that even when she looks away, her hands will lift again, tracing lines she cannot unsee.

At the market, she tries to interact with someone. A clerk approaches with a basket of vegetables. Mara speaks, voice slightly higher than normal, almost pleading.

“Excuse me, can you-”

The clerk’s gaze drifts down to her own palm mid-word. Fingers curl. Thumb traces a faint invisible path. The basket clatters slightly in her other hand. Mara flinches. The clerk blinks slowly, then continues her work as if nothing happened.

She walks outside, heart pounding. The world feels alien, muted, alive in its quiet obsession. She passes couples holding hands, each raising one hand to trace invisible lines. Children mirror the gesture perfectly, even when unsupervised. She wants to scream, to shake someone awake, but the words die in her throat.

By late afternoon, Mara returns home. Rachel is sitting on the couch, fingers tracing her palm, eyes fixed, humming softly to herself. Mara watches, frozen, a trembling weight in her chest.

“Rachel,” she whispers.

No response. Only the soft, hypnotic movement of fingers curling and flexing. The pull reaches her again, insistent, quiet, patient. Her own fingers twitch. She shakes her hands violently, trying to stop, trying to resist.

But she catches herself.

A long, slow look at her own reflection in the dark window. Her hands lift again, almost involuntarily. Fingers curling, thumb tracing a line she now knows is permanent. Her eyes widen, not in fear, but in recognition.

She understands at last.

The world has shifted. She is part of it, whether she wants to be or not. Resistance is a fleeting illusion. Awareness is meaningless in the face of the pull.

And in the mirror, she sees herself clearly for the first time—not just her face, but the quiet surrender in her hands.

She lets them hover, tracing lines she cannot unsee, feeling the pull, the rhythm, the obsession. It is terrifying, and yet... beautiful in a strange, haunting way.

The reflection smiles faintly, a shadow of her own lips. Her hands continue their movement, deliberate and reverent.

She knows she cannot fight it any longer.

And for the first time, she doesn't want to.

## Chapter 10 - The Habit

By Sunday, Mara has stopped resisting.

The city is alive in silence. Streets are full, yet empty. Shops are bustling, but the usual chatter has vanished. Clerks lift their hands above registers, fingers curling and flexing, tracing invisible lines. Customers mirror them, moving in quiet synchrony. Conversations have disappeared. People are absorbed entirely in the rhythm of their own palms.

Mara walks among them, feeling the motion in her chest, wrists, and fingers. Her hands lift automatically. She traces familiar lines, follows subtle curves she has memorized, flexes and curls with ease. The pull is no longer frightening. It is comforting, intimate, and unavoidable.

In the park, children move in fits and starts. One pauses mid-step, hand raised, eyes fixed on the invisible lines. A boy kneels in the grass, tracing the curves along his palm, completely absorbed. Parents nearby mirror the gesture, hands raised, fingers curling, as if the act itself confirms their place in the world. Mara notices a father crouched beside his daughter; their movements are perfectly synchronized, a silent, private ritual she cannot interrupt.

Daniel sits on a bench, hand lifted, thumb slowly tracing a line. Mara approaches, and their eyes meet. Words are unnecessary. A faint nod passes between them. They raise the other hands in unison, fingers curling in perfect rhythm. There is connection here, but it is quiet, unspoken. A communion without sound.

She wanders through an alley she once avoided. Homeless people sit quietly, hands raised, fingers curling, tracing invisible paths across their palms. Mara watches a dog nudge its owner's hand, claws flexing. The movement is almost reverent. She kneels, hand rising, and the dog mirrors her motion. She rises again, heart racing. The city is a cathedral of this silent devotion, and she is fully part of it.

At home, Rachel sits across from her, wine untouched, fingers tracing her palm slowly. Mara mirrors her sister's movement. Together, their motions sync, filling the room with a quiet ritual. The apartment becomes a sanctuary of synchronized attention, the outside world irrelevant.

Mara's reflection stares back at her in a darkened window. Hands raised, flexing, curling, thumb tracing deep lines. She studies herself, noting the subtle surrender in her eyes, the quiet awe in her lips. She has changed completely. Resistance has vanished. Awareness has been replaced with acceptance.

Outside, the city stretches endlessly. Windows glow with raised palms, fingers curling, tracing invisible paths. Couples sit together on benches, hands intertwined and one hand raised, absorbed in the motion. Children pause mid-play, tracing the lines with solemnity. Even the wind brushing through the trees seems slower, as if pausing to watch.

Mara steps into the street. Her hands lift, flex, curl instinctively. She traces every line she knows by heart, memorizing herself and the unseen world around her. She nods to strangers; they nod back. No words are exchanged, none are needed. The quiet is complete, and it is enough.

She pauses at a shop window and studies her reflection. Fingers lift automatically, tracing the familiar lines. She notices the faint warmth under her thumb, the delicate rhythm of her

movements. Her reflection smiles faintly, serene and aware. Mara mirrors it, raising her other hand. Her fingers move in perfect rhythm, tracing every ridge, memorizing herself, memorizing the city, memorizing the unseen.

The ritual continues. Time feels suspended. Streets, apartments, parks-all move with the same quiet devotion. Mara walks past strangers whose hands flex, curl, and trace. They glance at her briefly, recognition in their eyes, then return to their private observances. She feels no isolation. She feels belonging.

By evening, she stands on the balcony of her apartment, looking over the city. Hands lifted automatically, tracing, curling, following invisible lines. Lights glow from every window. Shadows flicker across the streets. Each person is absorbed, silent, focused, present. The pull courses through her again, steady and deliberate. It is no longer alien or frightening. It is part of life itself.

Mara lowers her hands briefly, then lifts them again. She traces every line, flexes every finger, and allows herself to sink fully into the rhythm. It is intimate, sacred, quiet, complete. The city moves with her. She moves with the city.

The habit is no longer a habit. It is life.

And Mara is finally, entirely present.

## **Author's Thoughts**

*The Still Hand* is a reflection on how habits and distractions quietly shape who we are. Mara's story asks: what do we give our attention to, and what do we lose when we focus elsewhere? It's a reminder to notice the world-and ourselves-before it slips away.