Chad

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i met chad after i was dead, i suppose, because i can't remember anything before he found me wandering around on the beach. how long i had been on the beach i could not say but i knew i was past the point where the ocean waves were cold. rather, they were numb against me as i walked.

chad stood looking at me for a long time and then he finally decided to accept me as i stood—half drowned, matted hair, clothes fairly torn, and even sand in my beard, which made me look like a man from the sea i imagine. he invited me to his house for a late supper and i complied by going with him. i followed chad and soon there was no more sand and the ground was a solid grey paved road. we reached his house which overlooked the sea and he explained to me that he had seen me coming for the shore and had supposed that my boat had capsized during the afternoon storm. i did not know there had been an afternoon storm or anything about a boat but i let chad think what he wanted of me.

after supper chad was good enough to ask me to stay the night. we talked by a fire that flickered in a stone fireplace and the wind blew in the trees outside the house. the hill
where the house stood seemed an easy place for the wind to find. chad said he often went to sleep by the whistling of the wind in the trees. we talked long into the night about what chad called issues of the time and i listened intently. i picked up the idea of the boat and said i had been away from the land for quite a while and so had lost touch with what was going on. chad almost seemed delighted at this admission on my part and he was quite content to sit with his pipe and tell me of politics, money matters, the sea, and women.

he told me of one woman in particular named rebecca and his description of her was like none he had given of the others he had talked about. rebecca, he said, lived about a mile down the beach and he had seen her often walking where he found me. he told me that he had at first thought it was rebecca on the beach and so now he laughed at the idea he could have mistaken a man for rebecca.

chad was before the fire with the poker turning over the embers and said he would show me to my room. the night does things to people and for some reason i sensed that chad might now have some fear of me and of his own hospitality. before he finished walking with me to my room he asked me more about myself. i answered with words that suddenly came into my head and told chad i had been a barrister in london and that i hadn’t made very much money but usually had plenty of time to be in a boat. that seemed to satisfy him and he wished me a good night.

i realized my eyes were open in the cool night and i was looking nowhere yet everywhere. for some reason i could not comprehend the ticking of the clock that was on the table next to the bed. time seemed endless. i could not move. just my eyes. i decided chad was thinking about me, continuing with me if only subconsciously. i noticed that the door began to open and as it did it split the sun rays that were shining on it, rays that were coming in the top of the window. it was chad.

he said, did you have a good sleep. i saw that he expected me to say that i had, although i couldn’t even remember
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sleeping, so i said i had and thanked him for the use of the bed. he continued in a smooth soft voice saying he had done a lot of thinking about me last night. i mumbled a thank you and he said pardon but i said it was nothing. he went on saying he had decided to ask me to stay on and recuperate. i told him i didn't want to presume upon him but he said it wouldn't be any trouble and really he wanted someone to be around with this being his last couple of weeks at the place. i asked him what he meant by that and as i did i noticed that he was younger than i had thought him to be last night and at the same time was wondering whether i was young or old but i let that pass, as long as he liked my company. he answered saying he was only on leave from the service but was expected to report back in about fifteen days. he admitted to me that he was not anxious for these fifteen days to pass because he knew he was to be sent into an area where direct fighting was going on. a patriotic air i assume came out of him then and he asked me if i had ever served my country. i was hard put to answer that question since i didn't even know who the hell i was let alone what country i was from. his face seemed to demand a yes answer, almost as if to justify his own part in the service so i answered yes and only vaguely noted his sigh of relief.

the days passed and i was still around listening to chad talk and beginning to have more and more questions about myself. what would happen after chad left and where would i go. i wanted to stay with chad as long as i could so i did not antagonize him or ask questions that would seem to indicate i wasn't who we had decided i was. i liked the house and frequently took walks around it noticing the very thick walls of brick and stone, the evergreen trees which added some color to the structure, and of course the view was excellent of the sea and the beach. i asked chad why the walls were so thick and he said there were some quite violent storms around here. then i began to wonder where around here was but chad seemed to think i knew so i never asked him.
on the seventh day of my stay with chad i met rebecca. chad and i had walked down the paved road toward the sea and she was there. she was a small girl in the distance and was small even after she was close to us. her dark hair hung down past the shoulders of her blue smock and with her head bowed she seemed to have no eyes because her bangs were heavy and long. i wasn't sure she knew we were standing there looking at her because she never once raised her eyes to look at us until she was about ten feet away. then suddenly she raised her eyes to look at chad and she recognized him and smiled faintly. she then turned to me and looked in my eyes and i found something familiar in those dark pools as if i had known rebecca before. i felt a oneness with her and her eyes answered mine saying yes haven't we met somewhere before but where, where—i could not turn my eyes away from her gaze. i felt an agitation at my side. it was chad and he was saying, have you two met before? i was able to turn away from her then and i assured him that i had never seen her before. i could tell immediately that chad did not believe me and he was very angry but how could i tell him what i had seen in her eyes. chad went to rebecca and took her by the hand. he told me he wanted to talk with her and asked me if i would go back to the house and wait for him there. it began to happen then almost before chad had turned his back on me and was walking away with rebecca. i knew that when chad went back to the house i would not be there. that was all it took i realized and how many times had it happened before—one silent wish that i would be gone one. my eyes watched chad and rebecca walk slowly down the beach, but only my eyes watched and soon the sea was numb against me and then i was the sea with one last thought—there was a reason for this meeting with chad. some reason to bring me out of the sea but it must have not been the time yet, not the right time and there would be another time, another time that chad would need me now that he had made my acquaintance. . . .
the trench was damp against the back of my khaki shirt and the gun was heavy in my hands. i did not know how long i had been in that position or where i was. i heard many sounds but could not figure out what they meant. i had only one thought and it seemed as if someone had told me that thought sometime and i had believed it then and believed it now. someone had said escape was possible from every circumstance and i kept believing it as i heard the sound of explosions near the trench. suddenly there was chad screaming my god help me you bastard in the night and the night exploded into day and was full of sound and then was night again with its rumbling rumbling sound.

chad was limp against the mud-water in the trench with his lower arm split open from a long bullet or maybe it was just because chad had fallen against the bared wire above the trench screaming god. chad, who is god. chad kept screaming and i kept believing i could escape from every possible circumstance so before i knew it chad was screaming god and it did not matter because i was gone and was with rebecca in front of the sea on the beach.

i was standing close to her but somehow i was from her. i did not know how much i was capable of at that point but somehow i knew i had to wait for chad, and wait and wait for him to stop screaming god into the night. rebecca looked at me with the dark pools she had for eyes and i wanted to reach out and touch her and take her hand as chad had done. wish me to do it chad, wish me to touch rebecca. suddenly there was a rushing sound like the sound of the wind stirring in the night—the sound of the wind in the night around chad's house on the hill. it seemed to be coming from inside me and was filling me with something and yet nothing. i touched rebecca and she smiled so i pulled her close and put my hand in her long hair. we turned and walked away from the sea up the hill towards the house. i began to laugh thinking i am wildly laughing and rebecca said, what are you laughing about chad.