



My Father's Hands

My father sits at the kitchen table
head bent over a teacup
patches of yellow-white skin
glistening through thin wisps
of gray hair.
His hands struggle
to lift the teacup...
the tea spills
splatters on the saucer.
He picks up the butter knife...
it slips between
his trembling fingers.

Tears drop.

I touch his hands.
He pulls them away.
"They're ugly old
good-for-nothing things," he says.
"The cancer has eaten them up."

I lean close to him
pull his hands to my lips
kiss them
press them against my face.

"Daddy, these are the hands
the strong gentle hands
that rescued me
when I was three.
You found me crying
on Melbourne Street
two blocks from home.
These are the hands
that wiped my tears
picked me up
put me on your shoulders.

"These are the hands
the soft loving hands
that cared for me
when I was ten.
I was in pain
my heart sick
from rheumatic fever.
These are the hands
that rubbed my back
fed me jello
made hand puppets on the wall.

"These are the hands
the wise sensitive hands
that comforted me
when I was sixteen.
I was lonely and sad.
My boyfriend, John
had moved far away.
These are the hands
that drew a world map
pointed to Montreal
John's new home.

"Daddy, these are the hands
the brave sweet hands
that let me go
when I was twenty.
I was getting married
moving to Chicago
far away from you.
Your hands held mine
gave me to Dan
tweaked my nose
waved "goodbye."

Tears fall
on my hands.

I dry his eyes
lift the teacup to his mouth
butter his toast.
I massage his hands
give him the newspaper
comb his hair
tweak his nose.
Then I show him my hands.
"Daddy," I say.
"These hands
my hands
are your hands now."