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### ***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."