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Hands

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HALLE MURCEK

HANDS

It is still a mystery who I have inherited my hands from. They do not resemble my mother's or father's nor their parents. But I hope they age the way my grandmother's hands have. I spent my childhood memorizing every part of them, the surface of her palms and the lines that undulate and swerve across her joints.

Hers are muted and pearly in the light, holding tranquility in her palms. Their shape is one that time cultivates, weathered and worn.

My young hands are showing the beginnings of calluses. I have been told I can stop a stranger if my hands are at use. They can make a simple task worth watching, captivating even.

Her flesh, with its balmy folds and puckers, seems as if it has just been laid across her bones like paper mache.

My hands remind me of blown glass and Christmas ornaments. They appear delicate and weak, but conceal resilience that has withstood oven burns, paper cuts, and chapped winter air.

My grandmother's palms trap scents of basil and mint from cooking supper or pulling weeds from her herb garden.

The tips of my fingers and the spaces between them absorb the scent of perfume from hurried spritzes and coffee as I sop up the foam from the bottom of my daily cappuccino. The dull hint of flowers and espresso beans lingers all day. Sometimes I rest my hand across my mouth, just below my lower lip, so I can inhale it.

Her knuckles are uncultured pearls extracted from fresh oysters, silken with a dull sheen. The skin that stretches over them fades in hue when she makes a fist or curls her fingers around crochet hooks. They are iridescent in the light.

I like how easily my knuckles crack. Using my thumb as leverage, I push each finger into my palm until the joint readjusts with a satisfying pop. This habit makes some cringe, shiver, or cover their ears. My mother yells. "Your gorgeous hands are going to end up ruined and deformed like mine!" She shoves her hands under my nose. Her knuckles bulge from her fingers that bend at odd angles. The ovals of her fingernails are misshapen and different, uneven lengths. My mother's hands remind me of pieces of shrapnel or the knotted roots of an ancient tree. They are beautiful in a way I think driftwood and beach glass are beautiful — natural weathered from earth, and imperfect, just like her mothers.

My grandmother's hands have rivulets of indigo veins I used to squeeze between my small fingertips. I loved how they felt as I pressed them down, cutting off the blood flow until I lifted my fingertip.

My blood vessels are only visible when I'm cold. Azure against olive flesh, thin and flowing like raindrop trails on a car window.

My grandmother would encase my hand in hers, enveloping it in a swaddle. I remember her hands, internal heat that never dulled.

My hands are made like hers, made to rub and massage, knead tense muscles on his torso, roll ovals into the fleshy part of his back with the heels of my palms, scrunch his shoulders with my fingers. I like how his muscles turn into something malleable with the warmth of my hands, like silly putty or clay, allaying under the power of my exertion.

Imperfections: I hate how they swell in the heat: how the rings I feel naked without become just snug enough that I have to soap my hands to slide them off. Typing, writing and cooking are a struggle when my fingers are engorged from summer humidity. They refuse to bend, and feel as if the skin across my knuckles will split open and ooze like blisters, become clumsy, fumble and falter at even the simplest tasks, like holding a pencil, brushing my teeth, or painting my nails. The tools becomes entangled between the spaces on each hand, falling to the floor or counter

where I pick it up, only to fumble again. And if I try to make a fist, or splay my fingers across the steering wheel of my car, my flesh stretches across my bones and aches more than the joints themselves, like leather or sheep's skin desiccated on a frame. I hate the hangnails and cracked edges of cuticles that fray near the bed of my nail. I bite or tear at them until they well up with blood, until they are sore for days after and I have to rub Vaseline to alleviate and coax them.