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Working Hands

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Working Hands

My mother's hands
were rough from shucking corn
and soaking her hands in dishwater.
Those hands, wide and strong,
propped my brother and me
on widened hips,
when we'd be too tired,
to walk back from town--
when Daddy had taken the pickup to work.
On Sunday mornings,
her hands, with long fingernails,
clapped to the rhythm
of the Holy Ghost.
Sometimes during a prayer,
I'd crack my eye open
witnessing her hand
taking Daddy's--squeezing it.
Once when I had a fever
late in the night,
those hands rubbed ice
on the bottoms of my dirty-child feet,
till the sun's rays crept
above the horizon, kissing the sky.
I've watched her hands
make clover necklaces for grand-babies,
pull lambs out of wet wombs, bloody and slick,
sew buttons onto plaid work shirts,
and rub the swollen hands
of her dying parents.

Now on Sunday mornings, years later
when I pray into the early light, I find myself
entranced with my smooth hands,
wondering if I've been living.