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My Father's Hands

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My Father's Hands

"This is how you hammer,"
my father said.

BANG

(bap)

"No. Like this."

BANG

(bap)

"Let's see your hands. There. That's why.
You haven't got your hands yet."

Haven't got my hands?

My hands trembled, not knowing how to become.
I plunged them deep in my pockets
to hide their shame, those pale spiders,
a boy's hands, incapable of love or plunder.

Should I beat them into shape with hammers?
Then they might resemble my father's hands.
Dark, hard, lined, pocked, bleeding...
Cracked open at times, from the cold,
like the skin of an overdone potato.

I watched the railroad workers at rest,
hands browning in the sun like young animals.
The farm boys, their hands throbbing suns,
thrusting pitchforks, snagging hay bales,
the wheat fields weaving brushstrokes of their pride.

Then one day I was forty and building,
and I glanced down and there they were,
my father's hands in mine,
strong, confident, toned and free.
I watched them yank boards, slam nails,
making the house speak back to the winds,
watched them hold my wife, caress my son's soft hair.

"This is how you hammer," I told my son.
And my hands were the flesh of my father's words.

-Sean Lause
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