

Your Hands

By Cathy Warner

Today is Tuesday. I pull into the driveway and switch off the ignition. My purse gapes open on the passenger seat next to a wad of snotty Kleenex. I want to grip the steering wheel and lean my head against my arms, close my eyes and open them again when I can no longer see my mother's hands, blue veined, smoothing her blue tinged hair, when I can no longer hear the smack of gums squeezing red Jell-O between her lips, when I can no longer hear the cut of her words. *I want to go home, and Where's Chuck? I always liked him, liked him better than you, and Andrew's better off picking his father.* I want to stay here until I can no longer smell cafeteria chicken and urine underneath her Windsong, until I can no longer feel the knobs on her back. Her stooped posture, an indictment for all the years she picked up my messes. Toys, clothes, relationships.

This is what I want to do, but I saw you, as I was driving to the house. You with your industrious hands, charge your lawnmower across the fescue between our houses. You who are in perpetual motion, you keep your hands full. A bucket of compost, jug of fertilizer, trowel, green-throated weeds. You plant seedlings in your greenhouse window nights, trying to make the best of it, while I sit at my kitchen table tracing the scorch marks wondering if I did the right thing, or if there were a different right thing I should've done instead of this right thing that feels so wrong.

I can't stay here strapped in my seatbelt locked in the driver's seat while you slice through the lawn toward me. There are groceries in my trunk and I stand by the open lid, the white plastic bags lumpy like piles of dirty sheets. Your bare feet flecked green step onto the cement two feet from my Naturalizers. You unlock your hands from the mower handle, wipe them across your jeans.

I wait for you to say something both true and funny, the kind of thing you say on Tuesdays to cheer me up. The kind of thing that would take me days to think up. Something like *The neighborhood's too sane without the old bird* or *If you're in the mood for another kitchen fire, I'm happy to help*. You stand with hands limp at your sides, face pale and telltale like a badly erased chalkboard. It is like looking at myself, alone at a party, everyone else carrying a full glass and story worth telling.

Then you grin like an imp, the reason I'm sure, Liza fell in love with you. *I'm going downtown for a while* you say. *I've been itching to wear that orange jumpsuit again.*

Today, because it is Tuesday, and because you've waved at me for the two years I've lived here and have stood on my porch holding out fresh picked zucchini and tomatoes, and because you blew a kiss to my mother when I drove her away for the last time, today, I step into you.

You cling to me with your hard hands. Your hands that punched through the glass window of Liza's office door, your hands that left purple bruises on your ex-best friend's throat, your hands that tore up mail addressed to Mrs. Robert Walker and scattered it in the street. Your hands that plant flowers and cradle earthworms grip me as if I am a lifebuoy, the only way to stay afloat. Not wanting to know what you did this time, afraid

to ask how long you'll be gone, I press closer as though we could become one organism, absorbed through touch.

Today is Tuesday, the day I visit my mother and rehash my crimes of love. The day I can't help but unravel. Your bones, like needles, squeeze against me mending the broken threads of myself. I breathe ragged and throaty into your salty neck. I feel the warmth of your damp t-shirt, the muscles beneath, the pressure of my thigh against yours, and I hold you, hold onto you. Touch you as if my hands knew your terrain.

Today is Tuesday, the day you mow the lawn. I imagine you tomorrow, boxed in, hands stuffed in your pockets or thumbing the pages of some fat novel, wondering if everything you've ever done is a mistake, while here your tomatoes droop in the heat. Then your hands clasp my face, covering my ears so all I hear is my pulse crashing like waves. Your mouth is on mine and together we mold something new from today as if it were clay. Forgiveness exchanged in the hot breath of our nostrils; lungs expanding to include more than our failures.

Soon you will release me. I'll step back and mumble something unintelligible and awkward before I dash to the house on electrified legs and fumble with the doorknob, unable to look at you again, vowing to forget this ever happened, yet remembering it always. You'll slam the mower into your garage, pile the clippings at the curb, notice the groceries in my trunk and leave them on my porch, then relinquish your freedom. For now we have this moment. Grace.