

99 Year-old Hands

DeMar Regier

When I touch Dad's mottled hand
veined and dry as the leaf that blows
through the door,
I remember other Octobers:
the bushels of apples he carried to the cellar,
heavy machinery lifted, stored in the garage,
cords of wood neatly stacked for winter.

I look at knobby knuckles,
wonder how such large fingers
tied minute flies for fishing,
repaired delicate chains,
mastered fine Palmer script.

I feel his palms, cold from a heart
too tired, too slow to pump,
remember how warm they felt
trudging through snow,
how steady they were helping guide my first bike,
how naturally they folded around a harmonica.

I recall fists steely strong
knotted around ropes for stubborn cattle
flattened to a swat on my bottom
when he thought I lied,
the tender way in which he
wiped away tears at Grandma's funeral,
or chucked a grandchild's chin.

Now I watch as one hand
shakily reaches for a glass on the care-home table,
observe both limp in his lap as I push the wheelchair
and know--as I leave--
that neither will be raised
to wave good-bye.

