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## Hands

By Claire Constance

Back when they were in grad school, my dad and his best friend Michael liked to invite people over for dinner parties.

Everyone who came would help with both the cooking and the eating and then later they would all settle down for a final course of old jokes, funny stories, and political jenga.

The first time that my mom came to one of these dinners she was standing with my dad in the kitchen, He dicing onions, she mincing words, when without warning

he slipped his fingers under hers and said—marveling as one might at a four leaf clover or a small glass bead—  
*you have beautiful hands.*

For longer than my lifetime, my mother's hands have checked pulses, given physical exams, felt foreheads for temperatures, set bones, drawn blood, and held other hands tight when they most needed to be held.

But as a Nurse Practitioner with Raynaud's syndrome, she has often shown up to work with only half-alive fingers.

And though she does what she can to recreate circulation in her hands you can imagine how her patients often react, if not at the mottled map of pink and white on her skin, then at the confusing combination of a kind face and cold fingers.

These days, my mother's cold hands are tired, too.

Tender tendons and swollen joints silently reveal themselves as patches of irritated pink and puffy tissue. But, even this map of memories written in sinew

is not a total testament to many ways  
my stubborn mother has continued to praise  
life for the little and big opportunities she is given  
to be creative with her hands.

*I love untying knots, my mother says to me with a wink.  
If only you knew how nimble  
these cold, old, fingers are.  
And people, she tells me,  
are the most interesting knots by far.*

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