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Hands

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HANDS.¹

Nikita Parekh*

Her hands. Small, but faithful.
They keep her whole.
Opened: reaching outward,
they welcome others forward.

Her hands. Opened, soft and beautiful.
They keep her whole. Remind her
that she can give to others,
selflessly, with all of her.

But when he asks, “Your ID please.”
Her hands tremble and fear seeps in
like clouds of a newly formed storm.
Brewing hatred, she waits for his next command.

¹ This slam poem is based on *Brown v. City of Oneonta*, in which an attempted burglary and assault occurred in a private home while it was dark. The victim only saw the hand of someone and informed the police she thought it was a young black man because the hand was dark in color. The police then detained and questioned any dark-skinned individual on the street, including preventing African Americans from boarding the bus at the Oneonta Bus terminal unless they agreed to be questioned. Additionally, hands are used in a variety of ways during police stops. “Put your hands up,” handcuffing, and “hand me your ID” are just some examples. Thus, I use the hands of a victim of police misconduct during a racial profiling incident to express the injustice in our colorblind system.

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Stunted, she can't move.
"Can I see your hands," he repeats.
Her hands soft, fragile, shaking as she hands her ID.
His touch lingers on her fingertips taking all of her.

He mutters under his breath,
"So sweet, brown sugar."
Straightjacketed by her own lips.
She stares blankly at his badge.

Her tongue becomes a dead weight,
recedes,
as the vomit crawls upwards,
choking her breath.

"Put your hands up, I need to search you."
His hands sear her soul and linger on her breasts.
Sweep across her waist. Down the small of her back,
tattooing his presence into her hips.

Her hands clutch each other
above her head. Seeking strength
and comfort from the other:
a reassurance that it will all be okay.

Asserting control,
he de-robes her bare
and steals her soul.
Conquering her all.

"You can put your hands down,
Brown Sugar."
Her lips scowl. Her eyes bruised. She stares
as he tells her she can go.

Her hands cover her mouth. Shocked.
The trauma of a balloon about to pop,
the needle poking deep within.
Knowing any moment the air will surge out, but uncertain when.

She walks back to her car.
Confused. Angry. Her hands grip
into a ball and fist her anger at the
injustice of it all.

She looks outward. Fazed and jaded.
The courts turn their backs.
Her hands left empty and closed
carry wrinkles of shame and anger.

*Brown v. City of Oneonta*² taught her
that brown hair and blue eyes are okay
but brown skin and black eyes were not.
And that was fair.

The law speaks of a colorblind society.
But the color of her skin shapes her world.
We forget that a history ties race and money,
blinding the rule of law she stands before.

What is justice?
A truth lost in the crinkles of her hands left empty.
Her two hands fisted. Closed.
Locked out of the legal system.

² *Brown v. City of Oneonta*, 221 F.3d 329 (2d Cir. 1999), *cert. denied*, 534 U.S. 816 (2001).

We are not all created equal.
You and I come from worlds apart.
When justice is blind,
access to a fair system is denied.

You deplete my value
when you tell me
race does not matter.
That we are blindly equal before the law.

The beauty is not that we are equal
but lies in our differences.
My past brings beauty to your present and
our hearts are united.

For I only have two hands.
One to hold yours and the other to point forward.
Acknowledge my worth. My being.
And hold my heart in your hand.

You only have two hands:
one to hold my heart and the other to point forward.
Connected: you are my past, present, and future.
I am your brother and you are my sister.

We are connected by the heartstrings of kindness.
I am your sister
and you are my brother.
So hold my heart in your hand.