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Right Hand

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The Right Hand

Robert J. De Smith

If you're a lefty,
Your right hand takes a beating:
It holds while the left flails away.

Mine bears the marks
Of a skidding box knife hitting home
Along the inside of its pinkie,
Pencil lead,
Its subcutaneous smudge in the meat of my palm,
An air nailer
Whose staple was long enough for a shingle
And the flesh of one-and-one-half finger tips,
And a screwdriver
Driven to the bone between two fingers.

That one was probed first by the ER Doc,
And, later, by the Physical Therapist—
Something about the unruliness of scar tissue:
It grows like a spider's web and needs taming.

Fainter outlines show
Where my lesser hand was caught
In the machinery of a swing set glider
and sliced by my chrome bike fender
(The bike was purple,
With side baskets and a twin-bulb lamp in its top bar).
There are half a dozen smaller scars for which I cannot dredge up memories.
And right now the hairs on its back are singed by the heat of a grille.

I'm not clumsy, exactly;
I've avoided more serious assaults
From lawnmowers and V8's,
And, despite skinned knuckle and blackened nails,
I'm handy around the house.

It's just that we all slip sometimes,
And we bear the marks;
We sometimes go bleeding into the house,
Holding a pulsing digit aloft, declaring,
"Looks like I did it this time!"

This flesh—
It stings, it gets stained and callous
And painted with white, hard lines.
I remember my Dad's mechanic's hands,
Etched in oil and grime;
And my grandfathers', peeling and coarse—
In need of salve
And white, sterile gloves.