

Holding Hands for Six Blocks of Broken Concrete Before...

The weight feels dangerous in my hands. It's a foreign sensation, a cold press against my skin. A shiver starts in the crook of my fingers and travels from there. I feel frightened with a gun in my hand and fingers so close to a trigger. I need some space; I need to push away. The gun is on the pillow next to me on my bed. Just laying there, staring me straight in the eyes. I shift and the bed creaks. There is a whisper that *God loves you*. Fingers hook the waistband of my pants and they are slowly pulled down. My words are so meaningless. Hands are everywhere, hands that feel so strange, still feel so foreign. Hands are pressing my words back into my body. There is a slight pressure that is constricting my chest; it is the beginnings of a sacrifice. However, things have been a lot worse than me feeling a little lonely. The space between is closed and so I shut my eyes, ignore the sirens, and let it happen: the release of the trigger and then the spill. It's true what they say about it being quick. The aftermath leaves a vibrato of heavy breathing and slight trembling. I make my way into the bathroom to wash the blood off my hands. They remain until the water runs clear over my pruned fingertips. I cannot stop scrubbing my hands, and even though the blood isn't visible anymore, I know it's still there. Somewhere below the surface pumps memories of everything that has been said and done along with everything I am going to do. Those are the promises to myself that I cannot keep. I am scrubbing the skin on my hands in the bathroom for a long time, until my landscape is changed. It is light outside; the gun is gone. My hands are still red, this time with rawness and exposure. I crawl into bed and underneath the sheets, curling into the best position that protects my heart, and it's not until the slow seconds prior to slumber that I realize my hands are clasped together like I am praying. When I fall asleep, my hands are tightly clenched into fists.

—*Jake Matkov*