

# My mama's hands

*Donna Bernhisel*

can hold eight eggs  
when she walks from the  
refrigerator to the stove,  
bacon fat popping out  
of the black skillet.  
Her hands can work  
their way around carrots,  
feeling through the earth  
for the ripest ones.  
They can pluck tomato bugs off  
of sticky leaves and  
fling them in the high grass.

My mama's hands  
can rub the knots out of my  
daddy's shoulders  
as he sits on the bottom step  
of the wooden front porch,  
his hands clasped between  
his workboots, him saying  
mmhmm, mmhmm  
to the rhythm of her hands  
rubbing away his day.

My mama's hands  
pick cotton and plums  
and pull feathers off chickens  
and wrap babies in blankets  
and pick flowers that she  
arranges in old pop bottles.

On Sunday  
my mama's hands lay  
folded on her lap.  
"Too wrinkled and ugly," she says,  
"but they work."  
So she keeps them together,  
each protecting the other.

But she'll forget.  
And I'll feel her arm,  
cool across the back of my neck.  
Her hands will rub my shoulder  
and finger the lace she sewed  
on my Sunday dress.

If I sit real still,  
she will smooth my hair,  
her roughened fingers sometimes  
catching.