

The Handing

—for Beth Rich

Emma Lou Thayne

She was seventy-one, moving on. Her five-foot-two
leukemia-lessened to eighty pounds, only
her hands the same, large, fanned storehouse of comfort, her
vitaligo, the brown pattern of taking on
the sun to map the journeys:

the girl pulling beets in an Idaho field,
the cheerleader hanging spirit on a megaphone,
the bride, her hand fingering his off to war,
the teacher chalking the books to read for AP English,
what she touched not a point of arrest
but a core to develop around;
the mother of seven spilling into a full house
aromas of roast beef and pumpkin pie, her savor
the center where reflections circle, events accrue.

He, a newborn seven pounds eleven ounces, her grandson, hands
big like hers even in their smallness
searching the improbable air, strands of fingers
bent on ancient clinging to other fingers,
limbs to climb by.

The day before she died, they laid him, three days old,
beside her, their hands magnets, his curls of pink
like miniature shrimp wrapping themselves around
her square straightened ones no longer taking on the holding,
about the ultimate business of letting go.

Her skeleton smile says Yes
to the One who holds our falling
with infinite softness.

I, the other grandmother, gather him in,
kiss the newest finger, my tears as unmeasured
as water sealed in glass, aligned with years,
and hold like him, like her, level with the coming
and the going home.