

Hands, A Choice

I reached over and held the hand of the woman next to me and prepared to be a dead man: Mark Hood, passenger, U.S. Airways Flight 1549, ditched in the Hudson River after striking a flock of geese.

This isn't a poem about choices, yet
they assert themselves as if they have
something to say about love or hands or

distances or falling. Every breathing thing
makes choices: to salt or not to salt, walk away or stay;
even the cat burdened with where to sleep.

Mundane and blameless or primed to blame another.

This could be a poem about hands.
How they free you from random choicelessness,
rise autonomous in storm or beatitude:

consider that sad flapping fish, the politician's hand –
your hand closes on his and shakes because
you still live at home and your folks are dyed-in-the-wool;

consider the soft-pedaled music of childhood's
Sunday hands turning hymnal pages
or the back-row matinee hand, blind and hopeful.

These hands know what they're doing.
And your mother's hands knowing when to let go,
refusing to throw off thin blankets to ring for the nurse.

Or your hand reaching for mine straining to understand
that I had no choice when I left, no matter what
your psychiatrist says. Options are never

something one can hang onto. Our hands are already full.

What would *I* do if a stranger grasped my hand
as we plunged earthward, no time for introductions
only a future-flash of sifted bones, aged and splintered,

trowelled from the crusted earth,
archeologists fashioning our histories:
lovers, they say, knowing us better than we knew ourselves

for perhaps we were or would have been
in the great unanswerable scheme of things:
two hands joined, a lifetime of flesh pressing

falling in, onto, over, down, a whole
cargo of love stacked and steaming
and no one else to give it to.

WINNING ENTRY



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