

I cannot see her face clearly as I once could, but I can see Grandma's hands. Hands with visible blue veins raised in ornate decoration on the backs. I knew those hands almost better than my own; and I used to wonder if mine would someday look like her's. They do!

Together with the vision of those familiar hands, I hear Grandma's voice, humming and crooning the words to the old hymns that she knew by heart, hymns that were still as new and fresh to her as her own childhood, but were as old and outdated to me as Grandma herself. As a girl, Grandma had sung in the church choir, even sung solos or sometimes duets with her sister. But upon her marriage to Grandpa, she had preferred to retire from the choir loft to sit with her husband in the congregation. Still, her voice rang out confidently during the hymns, even the hard ones.

And by the times she was a grandmother, her hands never even bothered to turn the pages of the hymnal, for the words were as familiar to her as her own name. Grandma sang continually, no matter what she was doing, singing those sticky-sweet hymns written with sincere sentiments, but poor theology. Her voice and her hands were always going, and as a small child I wondered if she would still be able to move those hands if she ever stopped singing.

*Jesus Keep me near the cross, there a precious fountain,  
Free to all a healing stream flows from Calvary's mountain.*

I can see those hands flicking the old-fashioned feather duster over the blinds,  
Grandma's hands dusting the book case and the corner desk:

*In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever,  
Till my raptured soul shall find, rest beyond the river.*

Maybe she wasn't my grandmother. Maybe she was your grandmother. Or maybe she wasn't your grandmother either, but your great-grandmother or a great-aunt or a friend's grandmother. Maybe she wasn't anybody's grandmother, just a myth we grew up with. But I think we all knew her, or someone like her.

Grandma's hands diapered babies back before the days of disposable diapers. Grandma's hands washed clothes back before there were washing machines, rubbing clothes on the scrub board or taking them through the wringer washer. Up would come the soggy garment, and down again for the rinse.

*There is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Emmanuel's veins,  
And sinner plunged beneath the flood, Lose all their guilty stains.*

Grandma's hands hung the wet shirts and sheets out to dry on the line, since there weren't electric dryers then either. Somehow she sang even with a wooden clothespin in her mouth, the sheets stretched out to bleach in the sun.

*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.*

Grandma's hands did the ironing, testing the heat with a moistened finger. Grandma's hands carefully folded clothes and put them neatly in drawers. Grandma's hands stripped beds and remade them and fluffed pillows.

*Out of the ivory palaces, into a world of woe  
Only his great eternal love, made my Savior go.*

Grandma's hands would dust white flour onto her apron, then her knuckles would whiten from tension to properly knead the bread dough. Grandma's hands deftly sliced onions and peeled potatoes and carrots with a short paring knife before there was such a thing as a food processor. Grandma's hands ladled homemade peach jam into the sterilized jars. Grandma's hands crimped the edges of the lightest pie crust in the county.

*Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord, To the cross where Thou hast died  
Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord, to thy precious bleeding side.*

Grandma's white-gloved hands stayed demurely folded in her lap through Sunday church service, raising a finger to her lips in a warning shush only once. Grandma's hands laid her regular weekly offering on top of the other envelopes in the shiny brass offering plate.

*I need thee every hour, Most gracious Lord...*

At home every evening before bedtime, Grandma's hands patiently turned the thin pages of her old King James Bible to read lines she knew by heart without even looking at the page.

*I need thee, O I need thee, every hour I need thee,  
O bless me now, My Savior, I come to Thee!*

Grandma's hands knitted sweaters and crocheted Afghans and cross-stitched samplers. Grandma's hands darned socks and hemmed dresses and mended tears in shirts. Grandma's hands tested the soil of her houseplants and watered those that were dry.

*Shall we gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river...*

Grandma's hands got dirt under the fingernails and grew stained with green grass and black earth as they pulled the young weeds out of the rain softened ground when she couldn't

remember where her garden gloves were. Grandma's hands dug for bulbs in the fall to move around for next spring. Grandma's hands plucked roses from the bush and put them in her favorite vase for the dining room table.

*Gather with the saints at the river, that flows by the throne of God.*

Grandma's hands adjusted the slipcover on her sofa, and moved a faded cushion over to the armchair. Grandma's hands straightened books on a bookshelf which had not been pulled from their places for perusal in years.

*Have thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way. Thou art the potter, I am the clay.*

Grandma's hands wrote thank you's to grandchildren and letters of news to her old school girlfriends in a school-girl perfect script, perfected long ago.

*Sing them over again to me, Wonderful words of life.*

*Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.*

*Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.*

Grandma's hands opened the old frame windows to let in the breeze even when there was none. Grandma's hands caressed the old lace tatting on the coffee table, a timeless treasure from her trousseau. Grandma's hands reached to minutely adjust the old oval framed portrait on the wall.

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross,*

*Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss.*

By the time you first saw Grandma's hands they were larger than they once were, puffier from arthritis around the knuckles, wrinkled and covered with liver spots, so that it was hard to believe they were ever young and smooth. Those hands that had known dishwater and bathwater and cleaning bucket water and stripped old wax off of floors, had long since been stripped of their young loveliness and indeed, her hands were the first part of her to have aged.

*Jesus calls us, O'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea...*

Grandma's hands straightened collars and tucked in shirttails. Grandma's hands buttoned the buttons in the back where it was hard to reach. Grandma's hands patiently held the brush and managed to work it through the long fair hair without pulling on the sensitive young scalp.

*What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!*

*What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer.*

Grandma's hands wiped runny noses and chucked dimpled chins and pushed bangs out of eyes. Grandma's hands pulled you into her lap and patted your knee. Grandma's hands noiselessly clasped your small one in hers when she heard about your pet dying.

*Take the name of Jesus with you, child of sorrow and of woe,  
It will joy and comfort give you, Take it then where'er you go.*

Grandma's hands tucked you in bed at night and smoothed the covers beneath your chin  
Grandma's hands demonstrated the way to clasp your hands together in prayer:

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from a world of care  
And bids me at my Father's throne, make all my wants and wishes known.*

Grandma's hands warned when she was irritated by drumming the table with nimble fingers. Grandma's hands were really riled up when they shook rapidly up and down, pointing a finger at you. Yet Grandma's hands were the magic ones that could put Merthiolate on a scrape and not have it sting; and Grandma's hands were the gentlest when it came to pulling band aids off.

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand,  
all other ground is sinking sand.*

Grandma's hands flicked off the speck of lint that her eagle sharp eyes could still detect on your spotless clothes even when she was up in her late 80s and you were all grown up.

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee...*

Grandma's hands once played the organ in the church before they could afford to hire a professional organist. Grandma's hands still caressed the yellowed ivories of her old piano in her parlor.

*He leadeth me, He leadeth me, By his own hand he leadeth me.  
His faithful follower I would be, for by His hand he leadeth me.*

Grandma's hands played nervously with the coverlet on her sick bed as she talked to her visiting pastor. 'I haven't done much with my life,' she told him. "I just stayed at home and raised a family. I haven't been able to give much to the church," she apologized.

*I love to tell the story, of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.*

I knew the Pastor well, for he had been at her church for several years, and since she had become a shut-in he had called often. He was, in the wisdom of my young adulthood, not

the best preacher I'd ever heard, and I expected another of his platitudes or handy biblical quotes to issue forth from his lip.

"You gave everything you had to give," he told her, taking Grandma's hands into his own. Words of comfort for a dying woman, I thought, busy planning everything I would accomplish in my own lifetime. But now, when I think of Grandma and hear again those songs of faith, and see again her busy hands, I wonder at how much she really did do, and how much she really did give.

*I love to tell the story, Twill be my theme in glory  
To tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.*