

# Hands

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After a long day at work she was exhausted. She made her way towards her red Cadillac convertible. The old New York Yankees sticker on the windshield was coming off. She pressed it back on with a sad smile and sighed. Five years had passed and the wound was still there.

She opened the door, tossed her attaché case onto the passenger seat, not caring that the laptop fell to the floor, and started the car. Immediately music filled the atmosphere at full blast. She always made use of this distraction when the memories would come, as if she could deny the existence of the sun by blocking its rays with a hand. The abrupt noise of the cell phone interrupted her thoughts.

“Hi Mom! What’s up?”

“Listening to your noise again?” her mom asked, half-joking. “How many times do I need to tell you to turn down the volume—I-can’t-hear-you!” Mrs. Tarmick said, almost shouting. After a couple of seconds she concluded, “Much better.”

She knew perfectly what was about to come. So she started mimicking and echoing her mom’s words as they came out of the cell, “One day you are going to cause an accident if you keep driving with the music blaring.”

“Sorry, Mom,” she replied with sham repentance.

Mrs. Tarmick laughed gently.

“Catherine,” she said, “I called to see if you wanted to come over and have dinner together.” She hesitated and then rushed through her next words, trying to make them sound as appealing as possible. “I won’t have any other guests over tonight—I’m leaving for Europe tomorrow, and I thought I could convince you to come with me.”

Changing the song, Catherine replied,

“Hm, no other guests? Are you sure there won’t be other people who happen to be, I don’t know, thirty-ish, single and male?”

Her mom didn’t know how to answer. Mrs. Tarmick had been trying to find a good man for her daughter, but Catherine was convinced that she didn’t need a significant other. Not yet. It was too soon.

“You got me,” said Mrs. Tarmick, hopeless. “Is just that, it’s been five years already, honey...Anyway, I do want to eat with you tonight, so I’ll tell this man the date’s cancelled.”

Smiling and sighing at her mother’s concern, Catherine said,

“I’ll see you in an hour, and please tell the cook

to prepare something light because I’m not hungry. And please Mom, don’t forget to tell the valet that I’m coming so he can park my car. I don’t want to walk much.”

“Catherine,” her mom said swiftly, giving it one more shot, “He’s very handsome...”

Catherine’s answer was an apathetic, forced smile. She hung up and dropped the cell phone on her lap, speeding up to enjoy the fresh air of the evening. But this agreeable sensation didn’t last very long. The setting sun made room for the moon to rise, and the fresh air of the evening started to become chilly. She lifted her foot off of the gas for a moment while she closed the roof.

As she did so, something fell onto the floor, but she didn't pay attention to it. Catherine's mind was on the many company projects she had been asked to oversee. Keeping herself busy was Catherine's objective ever since her dad had died a couple of years ago. In addition, the whole commercial empire of the Tarmick family had been placed in her hands, and she was an expert in managing it all. Up to now, her hands were filled with successful results.

Catching a glimpse of some cars up ahead, she pressed on the brake to reduce her speed. Nothing. She tried again. Something was stuck behind the brake – it was impossible to stop the car. She saw the lights of the cars in front of her, so close this time, and then everything turned black.

A few moments later she found herself lying on the ground. She opened her eyes slightly. Everything was hurting and she couldn't move. Breathing quickly, she became afraid and aware that something unknown was approaching her. Was she ready for it?

Slowly she tried to move her legs. Even the tiniest movement was impossible. She tried to turn her head, but she didn't have the strength. Lastly, she tried her hands. They were the only parts of her body that she could move. My hands, she thought forlornly and immediately a tear rolled down her cheek. She closed her eyes and replayed the events of that unforgettable summer day, five years ago.

They had gone to a New York Yankees match against the Boston Redsocks. It wasn't that she liked baseball, but it was Anthony's weakness. In spite of this, it seemed on that day he was in another world during the whole game. At one point he even asked if the Cardinals were winning.

"That was a good game, don't you think?" Catherine asked when it was over. She called the chauffer to bring the car around and continued. "I'm sure the Yankees will get into World Series this year."  
"I guess so..." said Anthony vaguely.

It looked as if he hadn't enjoyed the game, which was strange considering that it had been one of the Yankee's best during the whole season. Catherine's feminine intuition told her that something more was going on. She started to get nervous, but then excused him with having a stomachache.

Anthony stopped at the souvenir store and, smiling, showed a Catherine a Yankees decal.

"Cath," he said with a huge smile that blew away any trace of anxiety from his face, "Look! We can buy this sticker for your windshield!"

A sticker?...For my...windshield? wondered Catherine, raising her eyebrows at such a random and unexpected proposal.

Anthony shrugged his shoulders with his dazzling smile, the smile that Catherine was always unable to resist. Catherine nodded.

Anthony added with sincere enthusiasm,

"Look at its quality. It's perfect for you. You'll be able to stick it on every new car you'll buy."

"You are such a kid," Catherine said, hugging him.

A few minutes later, a white convertible Cadillac approached them. They both walked towards it. Catherine pulled out the sticker and cheerfully stuck it on the windshield. Anthony was getting into the back of the car while the chauffer held the door open.

They soon pulled up to a luxurious apartment building on Fifth Avenue. She had just moved into her flat, so everything was new. She had invested hundreds of thousands of dollars on it. It had been a family project; her mom had lent a hand with the interior design and her dad had paid the huge down payment.

Anthony sat down on the white sofa. Catherine went to the kitchen to grab some drinks.

“Cath,” Anthony said with a hesitant yet clear voice. “Come over.”

Catherine, after placing the drinks on a table, leaned on the couch. She looked at him, nervous and excited for what he would say next.

For the past couple of months Anthony hadn't been the same. He had gone on a retreat, and he'd returned a different person. Catherine perceived this change, and she was sure it was because he finally realized that he wanted to take their relationship to the next level. They had been dating for two years; it was time. Like any young woman of her age, she had started dreaming about a ring on her finger, and lately bridal magazines were a familiar companion during her free time. Since they would be leaving in a few days for a cruise through the Mediterranean with all their friends, she thought that a romantic Greek island would be the perfect setting for Anthony to propose, but maybe her apartment wouldn't be so bad either.

With her heart starting to pound, she came around to sit next to Anthony. Anthony took her hands, held them together and looked at her with his pure gaze. A deep, sacred silence followed.

Anthony broke the silence saying,

“For a few months I've been wanting to tell you something...”

Catherine looked at her hands, held by Anthony's. Pressing them tighter, Anthony continued.

“I had made a decision that will change...” A tear fell from his eye. He closed them for a second and he continued, “...that will change our lives.”

With a smile Catherine waited anxiously.

“I have decided...to...enter the diocesan seminary. God is calling me to the priesthood.”

Impulsively, Catherine pulled away her hands from Anthony's. She started shaking her head. Her eyes reflected doubt, confusion, sadness and above all fear.

“What?” she asked trembling. Anthony never joked with her like this. “What? Why?”

Anthony again took Catherine's opened hands. He looked into her eyes, hoping and praying hard that she would understand.

“Cath, look at your hands. What do you see?”

“Nothing,” she said immediately.

“This is what I saw when I held my hands out to God. They are empty. Yes, I have always helped others as best as I could—you know this Cath, more than anyone else—but I had only given what I could spare. God is asking to fill my hands to their full capacity, with things that will last forever.”

It hadn't been easy for Anthony to take the step. He had sincerely planned to marry Catherine, but when he went on that retreat, he realized how little he had done for God. He clearly heard God's call and invitation to give himself in a more complete way.

Now Anthony held Catherine's face with his hands, clearing her tears away. He knew how hard it was going to be for her. The biggest difference was that Anthony had God to cling to, but Catherine didn't. She had only started going to Mass when they began dating. That's why Anthony had taken every opportunity to teach Catherine about the love of God, trying to help her understand the depth and meaning of being a child of

God.

He wanted to stay and comfort her, but he knew that it was time to leave. He hugged Catherine, kissed her on the forehead and got up, wiping his tear-filled eyes.

Catherine sunk into the sofa. While Anthony was walking towards the door she started to shout between sobs,

“Your hands... are not empty...”

He stopped at the door, but then took a breath and walked out with heavy steps.

In tears, Catherine stretched out her arm to push a button that shut the automatic door. By doing this she also shut another door, the inner door of her heart.

“Never again...never...”

Guided by an impulse, she stood up, entered her bedroom and pulled down the crucifix Anthony had given her that hung above her bed. She did the same with a picture of Christ that she had in her living room and every religious image that Anthony had ever given her. She threw them away. Tired and depressed, she went back to her room and curled up on her bed looking at her hands. Accompanied by the sunset she fell asleep, hoping that by the next day the dark clouds of that nightmare would dissolve.

A simple picture of Our Lady on the wall opposite her bed was the only religious image that had accidentally survived Catherine’s impulsive purge. It was a representation of Mary when she was a teenager, dressed in a heavenly rose tunic and a light tan veil, hands together and eyes fixed on heaven. Under her hands there was an inscription: Mary, do not abandon me at the hour of my death. While drifting off Catherine saw it and recoiled at the reminder of Anthony, but the presence of a mother could not arouse hatred in her.

“Miss, Miss!” A male voice brought her back to the present moment. “Can you hear me?”

“What?” she murmured weakly, “What...?” She couldn’t continue.

One of the paramedics smiled, seeing that she had recovered consciousness.

“Miss, we are here to help you; don’t worry.” He was now putting a stretcher underneath her with the help of another paramedic. “Everything will be fine.”

“My—hands, my hands,” she said slowly in between breaths. The paramedic signaled to the other.

They put down the stretcher and he asked gently, “Are your hands hurting?”

Moving her fingers she repeated, “My...hands...my hands.” This time her voice was weaker. The paramedics looked at each other. It seemed that her time was fleeting with every second.

“Don’t worry, Miss; we are going to take you to the hospital. A helicopter is coming to pick us up.”

A young lady dressed in a light tan jacket approached the police officer on the scene and asked for permission to call a priest. Aware that she might not live for much longer, he conceded. There was a parish very close to the place of the accident.

A few minutes later, a young priest in his thirties walked towards the paramedics. As he passed by the totaled car, he noticed the model. Cadillac. He stopped and his eyes were attracted to a piece of glass lying next to his feet. It seemed to be a part of a window. It had an old, damaged Yankees decal on it, the edge curling up a little. As he crouched down to look at it more closely, he heard a fragile murmur.

“My hands...are empty...”

Standing up immediately, he approached the paramedics. They made space for him as soon as he came over to the stretcher.

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Then he saw her, and a tear fell from his eye. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a crucifix. Reverently, he knelt next to Catherine. He softly held her hands and said,  
“Cath... I’m here. I’m here. I can take care of your hands.”

Hope glanced across her face after hearing her nickname. Gathering all her strength she squeezed the hands holding hers, articulating slowly,

“An-tho-ny?... You...here...”

She tried to say more, but Anthony placed his index finger on her lips.

“Cath, here...” He placed his crucifix in her hands. “He will fill them, don’t worry...Open your hands to receive him.” He spoke softly and with the power of his consecrated hands, he gave her the sacrament of the last rites.

The noise of the helicopter made Anthony aware that it was time to say goodbye. Kissing her forehead, he murmured in her ear,

“You are ready, Cath, and he is waiting for you.”

Her restless face was replaced by a peaceful countenance. She didn’t need a helicopter. She had needed someone to cut the ties that were hindering her flight, and now she was soaring.