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Love Poem with Calloused Hands

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Frame: Love Poem with Calloused Hands

LOVE POEM WITH CALLOUSED HANDS

ANTHONY
FRAME

—for Holly

I'm reading the latest books by
my two favorite poets, arguing with myself
about whether they're any good. And I can't help
wishing you were here, love,

stroking my hair or kissing my neck
or reminding me that these men I'm reading
have no connection to the mother spirit.
Where were we, walking through

the art museum or stepping outside for a smoke
during intermission at the community theater,
when you first noticed my hands
had changed? The cuts and scabs

on my knuckles. The calluses spilling
down my fingers onto my palms.
It was dark outside, wasn't it,
the moon full and fogged by clouds,

your nose casting the softest silhouette
across your cheek, as if a spell
so I could know a god better named than Aphrodite.
Or maybe that's just the picture in my head.

Maybe it was bright—bright and orange
and perfect, the wind calm as it held
us together, the sun too lazy
to make us sweat. Or was it snowing

as we were trying to find the car
after the poetry reading where I bought
one of these books? And all our old friends
were following us for tea and you—

you said I could always drink tea no matter
the state of my hands. Maybe I'm just
lonely, wasting my lunch hour inside this truck,
here in the parking lot of one of the thousands

of restaurants laid down in our city
like the brown and orange and red leaves of fall.
I see the hungry come and go—
some ask for a cigarette, for spare change—

some carry their paper sacks of hamburgers
like a badge, as important and carefully
chosen as their *Support our Troops* and
I Love Dachshunds bumper stickers. None of them

remind me of you. How did we lose
the fire Prometheus so cleverly stole?
Not you love, not me—us,
this whole modernized species,

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desperate to force our fingerprints everywhere,
among our stars, inside our pets—soon,
I'm sure, the trees will be monitored
by barcodes—all so we can have more time

to show off our satin dresses and golf club ties,
to show our skin is nothing like the bark peeling off the trees.
It's why I can't read only one book
at a time, why I can't finish any

of the books I leave behind in my work truck.
And maybe that's why I don't sit
at a desk anymore, why I abandoned
my degrees and all those vengeful gods I'd built

in my own image. Of course, we both know it was one
of those quiet nights alone, your legs
stretched out over my lap like a blanket, the cat
asleep on your legs, the evening news on the TV.

If amid buying houses and cars and dreams—
if we find we've no time to walk along our river,
don't worry, love. I've stolen a fire.
It's burning my hands as I carefully carry it home to you.