

## Hands

Cool against my touch and malleable beneath my fingertips, the clay shapes to my will. Daily stresses leave my mind as my thoughts focus solely on my creation.

“Good, good,” Grandmother murmurs beside me, looking on at my work. “Always put contrast against your fingers, never press where there is no resistance, or your piece will break.”

The rush of Tel Aviv below reaches the makeshift pottery studio on the roof of the apartment. The scents of flowers and cigarettes and the ever-climbing skyscrapers surround me, but in these moments, I only see the quickly-drying clay before me and Grandmother beside me.

“I certainly didn’t teach you *that* technique,” she suddenly harrumphs, glaring at the hands that ignored her prior advice. “You do that again, and your piece is gone.”

“Sorry, Grandma,” I murmur, battling between doing it my way or adhering to her wisdom. I can see her hands itching to grasp the clay, but the tremors in her fingers prevent her—I choose the latter.

Perhaps my need to work with my hands comes from Grandmother, the skilled potter, or perhaps from her own mother, the woman who escaped from Afghanistan and rebuilt her life, or from Mom, who worked three jobs to take care of her family in a foreign country. My life comes from their hands, and so my hands too will be strong like theirs. I hope.

At school, I use my hands in an Engineering Design internship, designing and creating teaching utilities for my school. My hands glide over the mouse, drawing lines and typing measurements, manipulating the 3D printing software to my will.

I spend days perfecting a design, hands drawing and redrawing, producing only to hear “needs improvement” and rethinking my design. But eventually, a smile of satisfaction crawls through my face and my hands wring together as I plug in the printing process and press *start*.

Sometimes, a print fails, and it is up to me to fix it. Up to me to scroll through the print settings, to adjust a design to patch a weakness. And then I wring my hands together again and tap my feet as I wait.

But sometimes I can’t fix it. That piece I was working on with my grandmother ended blowing up in the kiln, beyond my hands. Sometimes random chance interferes and all the technique in the world cannot prevent it.

My grandmother is a smoker. And just as I can't put back together the dust coating the bottom of the kiln, I cannot repair the tattered remains of her lungs. But my hands itch to fix even what they cannot.

As I leave my grandparents' house, my grandma cries. "I don't want you to leave," she repeats over and over. "When will I see you again?"

My hands wrap around her tightly. "You'll see me again, we'll meet again," I assure her. Words had never tasted so bitter.

My grandmother taught me to use my hands, and for her, I will use them.