

***Baba's Hands***  
**Irma Nomani**

People often tell my older sister that her hands are just like my dad's. Her hands, *his* hands, are those of a child. They are small, with stubby, fleshy fingers and nails always perfectly trimmed. The skin is tight against their short, wide palms, firm and strong.

People tell my sister that her hands are just like my dad's. So, she is proud of her hands.  
But I,  
I am jealous.

I am jealous because my dad's hands are supposed to be mine.

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On summer nights, when I was in elementary school, when my mom would go to bed early and my sister would be engrossed in her TV shows, my dad would stay up with me. He would hold out his closed fists and ask me to pick one. I'd pry open his fingers to reveal either an empty palm or, if I got lucky and picked the correct hand, a shiny silver dime.

On other nights, he was a magician. With one hand flat on the table, he took a coin with the other and rubbed it against the top of his hand, until—three, two, one—the coin disappeared! Straight through his hand and onto the table.

And so many times, those same hands would put me to bed on nights before stressful math exams, when I was unable to fall asleep. On those restless nights, my dad's warm hand would rhythmically pat my forehead, and I would count each tap, until I drifted off into my dreams.

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But what I loved the most was simply holding hands.

At 7:30am on the way to elementary school, his hand held onto mine all the way to the schoolyard.

At 2:30pm, I ran down the school steps to seize his waiting hand and update him on all that had happened in the last 7 hours of my life.

After dinner, my dad went for a walk and I tagged along. His pace was a little too quick, but I grabbed onto his hand anyway, as my short legs tried to catch up with his.

I asked him if I was slowing him down, but he always shook his head, and never let go.

And I never let go either. I held his hand because, growing up, I was always afraid that I would lose him. I always worried:

*Will he be there when I get into high school?*

*Will he see me graduate?*

*Will we travel the world together?*

It was a crazy fear, based on no reasonable grounds, but that he always seemed so fragile,  
so old,  
so weak.

He had migraine attacks that reduced him to tears. And whenever he had even a simple cold, his coughs echoed through the house for weeks.

So, I held onto his hand, with the fear that if I let go, it would be for the last time.

Paranoid, I used my new flip-phone with its 1.3-megapixel camera to take photos of him.

Sneakily, I used its voice recorder to capture the jokes he made and stories he told at the dinner table.

When he is gone, I thought, I will at least always have these.

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I don't know if I was being immature then or too mature, cautious or over-cautious, but over the last several years, I have been worse.

My fear that I would lose him never went away,  
but once high school rolled around, there were too many math problems to solve,

too many texts to respond to,  
and too many pages to flip.

My hands became too full to hold onto his.

Today, his hands are 200 miles out of reach.

The hands that entertained me with magic tricks,  
the hands that erased my worries,  
the hands that ensured me he was still by my side,  
have been replaced by his voice.

I call him several times every day, and his voice is always there to comfort me, his words assure me that everything will be OK.

But words are not the same.

Words can be recorded, recalled, and repeated.

But it is harder to bring back the feel of a hand in your hand, the comforting touch, and the squeeze filled with love.

So, while my hands don't look anything like his...

Don't feel anything like his...

I hope one day they can hold the same magic as my dad, my Baba's, hands.