



Blessings for the Hands (Phoenix Poets)

Matthew Schwartz

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From *The Sky Inside the Shaking Tree*

What you feel
reveals you.

Watch
for the sustenance
inclined to a source,

enamored of singularity,
quickly here and quickly

gone, shadow from which
the body's courage comes.

Fireflies
apparently stumbling.

I slapped one on my leg.
Its blood glowed.

Blessings for the Hands follows various speakers—often disabled speakers, who never once figure themselves as objects of complaint or self-pity—through the haunted dreamscape of “normalcy.” Indeed, dreams are continuous presences in this unusually subtle and elegant debut collection that juxtaposes physical circumstances with the vast interior life of the imagination. The subjects of *Blessings for the Hands* are real and imagined confrontations—and reconciliations—between family members, friends, strangers, and animals. Matthew Schwartz’s quasi-autobiographical verse complicates and clarifies the emotions waiting just underneath the patterns and expectations of the speakers’ daylight lives, where anger, joy, corporeality, and mortality all seem to collide. For Schwartz, poetry is a sleight of hand that keeps the reader guessing through nearly imperceptible shifts between present vision and absent reality. *Blessings for the Hands* is a lyric reckoning of the tension between the life we are given and the life we are determined to lead.

“*Blessings for the Hands* is emotionally strong and imaginatively wild, distinctive, deeply moving, without an ort of self-pity, and pervaded by ‘compassion down to your fingertips’ (which Chekhov said is ‘the only method’ both to write and to live). This angle of vision is sharp enough to unify much disparate material. The poems are clear and musical and consequently a pleasure to read and reread despite their gravity. I think this may be lasting work.”—Michael Ryan

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