

The Touch

by Anne Sexton

For months my hand was sealed off
in a tin box. Nothing was there but the subway railings.

Perhaps it is bruised, I thought,
and that is why they have locked it up.
You could tell time by this, I thought,
like a clock, by its five knuckles
and the thin underground veins.
It lay there like an unconscious woman
fed by tubes she knew not of.

The hand had collapse,
a small wood pigeon
that had gone into seclusion.
I turned it over and the palm was old,
its lines traced like fine needlepoint
and stitched up into fingers.
It was fat and soft and blind in places.
Nothing but vulnerable.

And all this is metaphor.
An ordinary hand -- just lonely
for something to touch
that touches back.
The dog won't do it.
Her tail wags in the swamp for a frog.
I'm no better than a case of dog food.

She owns her own hunger.
My sisters won't do it.
They live in school except for buttons
and tears running down like lemonade.
My father won't do it.
He comes in the house and even at night
he lives in a machine made by my mother
and well oiled by his job, his job.

The trouble is
that I'd let my gestures freeze.
The trouble was not
in the kitchen or the tulips
but only in my head, my head.

Then all this became history.
Your hand found mine.
Life rushed to my fingers like a blood clot.
Oh, my carpenter,
the fingers are rebuilt.
They dance with yours.
They dance in the attic and in Vienna.
My hand is alive all over America.
Not even death will stop it,
death shedding her blood.
Nothing will stop it, for this is the kingdom
and the kingdom come.