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### Awkward Hands for Mighty Pillars

My father was always ashamed of his abnormally-large thumbs. They always got in the way of his passions: he spent 40 years only listening to guitar because his thumbs held down three strings at once. He gave up his love for drawing, as his grip caused pencils to scratch and bite the paper. He gave up his dreams of becoming an architect when his fingers couldn't deliver the precision the field required. To anyone who didn't know my father, a photograph of him hiding his hands behind his back might suggest that he was thinking of his posture—but in truth, he was simply ashamed of his hands. My father's love for art, music, and dreaming gave way to a life as a truck driver because his hands were too heavy for all the love he wanted to show.

But my father didn't just carry the weight of his hands; he also carried the weight of being an Asian immigrant in America. He constantly faced language-based discrimination, daily microaggressions, and blatant racism. My father fought these barriers by immersing himself in English studies whenever he could, always striving to communicate better. I remember how he'd greet people with a wide, genuine smile, wholeheartedly believing that his innocent enthusiasm could bridge the chasm between us and the world around us. Still, I can clearly recall the judgmental stares and mocking laughter when we were out in public. His awkward pronunciations were often met with narrowed eyes, frustrated scoffs, and dismissive hand waves. The sting of those moments would stay with me for weeks; whenever I was visibly confused or upset, my father would reassure me, "It's because my hands are too large, Doong-ah. Isn't it funny? They laugh because they've never seen such large thumbs, hah!"

As I grow older, I realize how much of my father lives in me: I inherited his thumbs.

However, I've never once been ashamed or embarrassed by my hands. When I practiced piano, my father would cheer, "Look how easily her hands can fly across the keyboard!" When I practiced art, he'd encourage me, "Take up more space—take up the entire canvas!" As a child, when my father lifted me and spun me around, his massive hands felt like steady pillars, ones from which I could soar far beyond the limits of my tiny legs. And when he patted my head during moments of sadness, his hands felt like I had a permanent roof over my head—one that

would always be there to shield me from any storm. Through his love and encouragement, he made sure I never developed the same insecurity over this physical deviation of ours.

And because of him, I've never once felt alien or strange to be an Asian in America. I always felt proud of what I could accomplish, proud of what my father made me believe I was capable of. My father came from poverty, from lack of opportunity, from obstacle after obstacle. Yet through his immeasurable sacrifices, his unwavering support, and his boundless encouragement, he showed me how to move forward with confidence. My father's massive hands—although awkward for more delicate tasks—lift up my past, present, and future selves, allowing me to embrace my potential without fear.