

## My Father-in-Law's Hands

scared me to start with:  
coal-cuts willow-patterned into blue  
knuckles hammered and hurt  
from pit accidents never mentioned,  
finger ends splayed as spoons –  
over those final years they peeled potatoes,  
offered a mug of too strong tea,  
soaped and rinsed casseroles, dug-in  
begonias, seed potatoes,  
turned pages of a picture-book for the grandson on his lap.  
All those years it was his wife's fists  
on the broom handle above your back:  
he was a refuge, a last resort. Told: *you've gone soft.*  
Growing older, eyes watering more and more  
over Saturday evening's Pink and its report about the match,  
he'd use an ironed cotton handkerchief  
to blot these tears with his man's hands, hard-battled,  
even forbidding. Not hands for touching,  
but I wish I had braved our diffidence.