

POETRY

Six hands

I've never been good with them.
My scissoring leaves jagged edges.
The sensitivity of my touch
on a vein is dull, followed by
a puncture too deep or too slow.

Like two neurotic children,
when they make a mess of a task
they invent an excuse and say
the stupid project was my idea —
appendages are not to blame.

I've never understood why they
disguise their motivation
from my brain. I imagine
handfuls of accomplishment,
but my hands do not agree.

Twenty-seven bones, but only eight in the wrist
have proper names. Capitate, scaphoid, lunate,
trapezium. Triquetrum, trapezoid. Hamate
and pisiform. The closer to the centre you get,
the more peculiar your shape, the more respect
the authorities give you, the more a student
has to memorize your name to pass her exam.

This is as far as it goes,
my first girlfriend said
and nodded to the knot
of our clasped hands.

Fifteen, and not even
a kiss. Since then my hands
have navigated a lot
of ground — the cream,
the most enduringly
supple and enchanting
continent of which,
my heaven, is your skin.

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