Without Hands

Lorna Crozier

[In memory of Victor Jara, the Chilean musician whose hands were smashed by the military to stop him from playing his guitar and singing for his fellow prisoners in the Santiago stadium. Along with thousands of others, he was tortured and finally killed there in September 1973.]

All the machines in the world stop. The textile machines, the paper machines, the machines in the mines turning stones to fire. Without hands to touch them, spoons, forks and knives forget their names and uses, the baby is not bathed, bread rises on the stove, overflows the bowl. Without hands, the looms stop. The music stops.
The plums turn sweet and sticky and gather flies.

Without hands
without those beautiful conjunctions
those translators of skin, bone, hair
two eyes go blind
two pale hounds sniffing ahead and doubling back to tell us
of hot and cold or the silk of roses after rain are lost
two terns feeling the air in every feather are shot down.

Without hands my father doesn’t plant potatoes row on row, build a house for wrens, or carry me from the car to bed when I pretend I’m sleeping.
On wash-days my mother doesn’t hang clothes on the line, she doesn’t turn the pages of a book and read out loud, or teach me how to lace my shoes.

Without hands my small grandmother doesn’t pluck the chicken for our Sunday meal or every evening, before she goes to sleep, brush and brush her long white hair.