**‘This living hand, now warm and capable’**

This living hand, now warm and capable

Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold

And in the icy silence of the tomb,

So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights

That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood

So in my veins red life might stream again,

And thou be conscience-calm’d–see here it is–

I hold it towards you.

—John Keats

**Episode of Hands**

The unexpected interest made him flush.

Suddenly he seemed to forget the pain,—

Consented,—and held out

one finger from the others.

The gash was bleeding, and a shaft of sun

That glittered in and out among the wheels,

Fell lightly, warmly, down into the wound.

And as the fingers of the factory owner’s son,

That knew a grip for books and tennis

As well as one for iron and leather,—

As his taut, spare fingers wound the gauze

Around the thick bed of the wound,

His own hands seemed to him

Like wings of butterflies

Flickering in sunlight over summer fields.

The knots and notches,—many in the wide

Deep hand that lay in his,—seemed beautiful.

They were like the marks of wild ponies’ play,—

Bunches of new green breaking a hard turf.

And factory sounds and factory thoughts

Were banished from him by that larger, quieter hand

That lay in his with the sun upon it.

And as the bandage knot was tightened

The two men smiled into each other’s eyes.

—Hart Crane

**‘Out, Out—’**

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard

And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,

Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.

And from there those that lifted eyes could count

Five mountain ranges one behind the other

Under the sunset far into Vermont.

And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,

As it ran light, or had to bear a load.

And nothing happened: day was all but done.

Call it a day, I wish they might have said

To please the boy by giving him the half hour

That a boy counts so much when saved from work.

His sister stood beside him in her apron

To tell them ‘Supper.’ At the word, the saw,

As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,

Leaped out at the boy’s hand, or seemed to leap—

He must have given the hand. However it was,

Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!

The boy’s first outcry was a rueful laugh,

As he swung toward them holding up the hand

Half in appeal, but half as if to keep

The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—

Since he was old enough to know, big boy

Doing a man’s work, though a child at heart—

He saw all spoiled. ‘Don’t let him cut my hand off—

The doctor, when he comes. Don’t let him, sister!’

So. But the hand was gone already.

The doctor put him in the dark of ether.

He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.

And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.

No one believed. They listened at his heart.

Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.

No more to build on there. And they, since they

Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

—Robert Frost

**Consider the Hands that Write This Letter**

*after Marina Wilson*

Consider the hands

that write this letter.

The left palm pressed flat against the paper,

as it has done before, over my heart,

in peace or reverence

to the sea or some beautiful thing

I saw once, felt once: snow falling

like rice flung from the giants’ wedding,

or the strangest birds. & consider, then,

the right hand, & how it is a fist,

within which a sharpened utensil,

similar to the way I’ve held a spade,

match to the wick, the horse’s reins,

loping, the very fists

I’ve seen from the roads to Limay & Estelí.

For years, I have come to sit this way:

one hand open, one hand closed,

like a farmer who puts down seeds & gathers up

the food that comes from that farming.

Or, yes, it is like the way I’ve danced

with my left hand opened around a shoulder

& my right hand closed inside

of another hand. & how

I pray, I pray for this

to be my way: sweet

work alluded to in the body’s position

to its paper:

left hand, right hand

like an open eye, an eye closed:

one hand flat against the trapdoor,

the other hand knocking, knocking.

—Aracelis Girmay