

For my Grandmother Knitting

There is no need they say
 but the needles still move
 their rhythms in the working of your hands
 as easily
 as if your hands
 were once again those sure and skilful hands
 of the fisher-girl.

You are old now
 and your grasp of things is not so good
 but master of your moments then
 deft and swift
 you slit the still-ticking quick silver fish.
 Hard work it was too
 of necessity.

But now they say there is no need
 as the needles move
 in the working of your hands
 once the hands of the bride
 with the hand-span waist
 once the hands of the miner's wife
 who scrubbed his back
 in a tin bath by the coal fire
 once the hands of the mother
 of six who made do and mended
 scraped and slapped slapped sometimes
 when necessary.

But now they say there is no need
 the kids they say grandma
 have too much already
 more than they can wear
 too many scarves and cardigans –
 gran you do too much
 there's no necessity...

At your window you wave
 them goodbye Sunday.
 With your painful hands
 big on shrunken wrists.
 Swollen-jointed. Red. Arthritic. Old.
 But the needles still move
 their rhythms in the working of your hands
 easily
 as if your hands remembered
 of their own accord the pattern
 as if your hands had forgotten
 how to stop.



Liz Lochhead

For my Grandmother Knitting by Liz Lochhead
 from *A Choosing: Selected Poems* (Polygon 2011)
 Reproduced with permission of Birlinn through PLSclear