

strands of us

my grandfather's hands liked axe work,
flukey veins under wish-bone skin,
sinews and handle as one, gift
of crack as metal buried
in grain, kindling stacked, neat, ready.
my father's hands flitted over

ivory, danced and vamped over
not knowing how, all the flats as work
preferred. my hand runs the ready
neck of 'cello, second skin,
first instinct. my grandfather buried
himself in letters, pre-dawn gifts

the ritual, reason gifting
hand and nib to ravel over
cirrus of doubt. father buried
himself in cheque book, Tuesdays, working
his hand in bursts, cut-up sea. skin
shushing, my hand intincts page, ready

for thievery, the quick note. ready
hands these – crotchets, shy logic – gift
truths in bone, hymns of us, skinned
of fret and cadence, shaped over
years by purge and loss and a working
God. war atrocities are buried

a childhood country town is buried,
shame is dug deep, hands ready
to hide. but these hands also work
as cup, to hold and harbour, as gift
shell sounding our other voice over
the hours. unspokens form skin,

and kin being three quarts skin –
chopping wood, grandfather's hands buried
splinter deep, my severed pen over
the crease of evening, father's ready
grip impatient inside mine – gift
thinkings. later, in 'cello work,

light grainy, Bach practised, ready,
sinews and string and phrase as one, gift
from the strands of us at work