

The New Criterion

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Back of the hand

by Dick Allen

There's not much of interest here,
lumina, fingernails,
risen veins, joints, tendons,
skin wrinkles,

but when you give me it,
it's like the slap
of a backhanded compliment,
or a sharp rap

on the knuckles,
and my eyes smart,
bad blood rushes between us,
it becomes evident

there will be no turning
your hand around,
no new grip of friendship,
no open palm,

just that flick of wrist telling me
I shouldn't complain,
your perfected dismissive gesture
of utter disdain.

Dick Allen's new volume of poems, *Present Vanishing*, has won the 2009 Connecticut Book Award for Poetry.

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