An Old Woman

An old woman stops,
lowers herself
on to the step, at the same
place, each
day. Her skin rustles

like old brown wrapping-paper.
She sits, leans against the wall.
Her walking-appliance
waits, at her side, without love,
to be of use. Stainless bright

metal, fiercely reliable, faultless
of design, reflects the sunlight
sometimes, a blinding twinkle.
Her fist, a half-formed
thing — the hand’s rare structure grown

over burgeoning ages for response and use
unshaped here, unshaping, an arthritic
botch — has appended
a polythene bag, for shopping.
This pause intersects the two-
hundred-yard travel between home
and shops, each day, there and
back. The pitiless void
face she turns on the variegated young
who flow painlessly by,

pressed for time, is blankly
unanswered: they’re heedless
of her stayed life, age-odoured rooms
chock-a-block with photos and clutter. She is
left, spare, unreachable; her function is disuse.

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