

Trompe L'oeil

by Juliet Latham



Image: "Floating" by Betsy Mars. "Trompe L'oeil" was written by Juliet Latham for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, March 2019, and selected as the Artist's Choice.

What if the retina
jolted by a light
sent its obligatory signal

to the brain and formed
a woman
and that woman is me

a floater
which my doctor tells me
can be very normal

just a fiber clump
in the vitreous gel
that inhabits the eye

I learned early
this trick
of suspension

how to dart away
from any gaze
held too long

hover
just until
it is unclear

if what you watch
is the world you have left
or a tunnel you might enter

the things an eye
can see from this height
my mother's face

hiding poison
only meant
for me

the lover on Chestnut
all charm in light
bullets by dark

business trip, an elevator,
strange man's mouth
doors sealed hard

too many floaters
and a flash of light
is an emergency

my doctor says
I'm high risk
for retinal detachment

quizzes me on symptoms
to see if I'm listening
I tell her acute episodes

of imaginative replacement
floating, looking out
when I should be looking in

the presence of any magic
holding up the body
in lieu of trust

perhaps she's warning me
about blindness because
she doesn't know

I'm floating here
beyond her pencil of light
asking if this eye

is all there is to see.