



Image: “Waste” by Lynn Tait. “Aloft” was written by Heidi Williamson for *Rattle’s* Ekphrastic Challenge, July 2021, and selected as the Editor’s Choice.

Heidi Williamson

# ALOFT

*Overcome space, and all we have left is Here.  
Overcome time, and all we have left is Now.  
—Richard Bach, Jonathan Livingston Seagull*

My mother reads distances like light.  
She can balance atoms from the sea in the cup of her hand:  
those strange creatures beneath the surface of being,  
she owns them too. They come home to her  
while I linger at the window again watching.

While I linger at the window again watching,  
the moment hefts itself off its hinges and swings away into light.  
This isn’t a dream. It’s what happens in the day if you look closely enough.  
There’s my mother in the sunset, the sunset that goes nowhere  
like it’s somewhere. I can knock at the light, but she can’t let me in.  
I can knock until my knuckles bleed, but her pain won’t open for me.  
The ridges in my fingers swell like waves with the pain  
of not holding her hand, not being able to.

Not holding her hand, not being able to:  
it isn’t because of the virus, though there’s that too. I’ve never  
been able to hold her close. The same way atoms move  
because you witness them—your presence disturbs them into action.  
My mother would open and close her mouth on the silences  
above and below. When I say I love my mother what do I mean.

When I say I love my mother what do I mean. Meaning hovers  
like a bird pinned before the factory of thought. Do I mean?  
I can assemble atoms into pictures that all contain my mother.  
I say I love but what. There is light. There are windows.  
This is the moment we have passed.