My mother’s hands

When I was young
   My mother’s hands were strongholds
   Pulling the weight of her ancestors
   Across an entire ocean
   So that one day
   My brother and I
   Might be able to say
   That we lived the American dream.

For years, my mother’s hands
   Have been those of a physical therapist
   Day in and day out
   Giving her strength
   To children with none of their own.
   Her exhausted hands still
   Would tuck me in every night.

My mother’s hands now
   Are the textbook picture of osteoarthritis.
   She hides them when we take photos,
   And complains of how ugly they are—
   Her hands which have built mountains.

I look at her hands and I see
   Swollen joints, nodules,
   Knobby knuckles glaring at me,
   The product of her hard work—
   My mother who stands at 4 feet 9 inches tall,
   But whose spirit towers over skyscrapers.

The same hands that have held me forever
   Now struggle to grip
   The handle of her morning mug
   Of coffee.
   My mother’s hands are falling apart
   Before my eyes.

My mother’s hands
   Were her gift to me.
   On the soonest day possible,
   I will tell her to pick which planet she likes best,
   And I will scoop it up and hold it there
   Gently in my hands, with all that I am
   Because of her,
   And I will give my mother the world.

 Gabriele Espiritu

Ms. Espiritu is a third-year medical student at Louisiana State University School of Medicine at New Orleans. Her poem received third place in The Pharos Poetry Award competition 2018. Ms. Espiritu’s e-mail address is: gvespiri@gmail.com.