

Jane Hirshfield

*A Hand Is Shaped for What
It Holds or Makes*

A hand is shaped for what it holds or makes.
Time takes what's handed to it then—warm bread, a stone,
a child whose fingers touch the page to keep her place.

Beloved, grown old separately, your face
shows me the changes on my own.
I see the histories it holds, the argument it makes

against the thresh of trees, the racing clouds, the race
of birds and sky birds always lose:
 the lines have ranged, but not the cheek's strong bone.
My fingers touching there recall that place.

Once we were one. Then what time did, and hands, erased
us from the future we had owned.
For some, the future holds what hands release, not make.

We made a bridge. We walked it. Laced
night's sounds with passion.
Owls' pennywhistles, after, took our place.

Wasps leave their nest. Wind takes the papery case.
Our wooden house, less easily undone,
now houses others. A life is shaped by what it holds or makes.
I make these words for what they can't replace.