Holding
-for Deborah, in memoriam

The narrow dock shrouded in mist, I can’t pick out even the faintest outline of a boat, let alone the distant shore. The air’s so dense and close I feel cloud bound, almost afraid to turn around, barely able to see my own hand as I nudge the tackle box closer then cast a line so it arcs away into the grey nothing, line lost from sight. I can’t aim, can’t pick its path of descent, can only wait, my hand feeling the filament go light as if it alone connects me to the world. I pivot, turn slowly, feel the wood beneath my feet so close

I feel it right through my shoes, planks so close I swear I can sense the grain, the ridges and lines of growth gone dead. I become landscape as I turn the reel, slow, cinematic. Virginia, I’d pick the deep hole near that submerged log. But there’s a lone tug, the tip of the rod bends, and my hand is a machine at work, fingers little robots, hand automatic at the reel. Is the world too close or too far? I fish where water and air merge in a lone horizon, the place where what appears to be the line between worlds blurs. I can almost see, almost pick out small shapes, leaves floating, as fall makes a U-turn toward ice. Irrepressible, the green oak’s turn from nubby-fingered leaves to these brown hands adrift on the surface. And as I toy with oblivion, pick the deep spot, the rod jerks, and I think, so close— you can be so close to crossing that line between what’s real and not, sane and not, when alone

even you might decide to jump, the lone thing holding you back, keeping you from a turn away from reason—the one thing keeping the line from snapping or going slack—the tension of the hand, fingers that hold the world lightly, hold it close. If you’re not too tired or too lonely or too sad to care. You pick.