

## 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.