

The Casting Lesson · *Dinah Berland*

I watched you cast
on the empty pond 'til dusk,
cigarette dangling
from your lips, focused only
on the barren water. "Be vigorous,"
you said. "Be gentle."

You were afraid I'd quit,
throw the rod down
on the concrete bank
like the time I threw my violin
against the bed, shattered
because I couldn't make Mozart sing.

I wanted to be a natural for you,
like I wanted to be
a virtuoso for my father,
to draw the bow across the strings
so sweetly—do it right just once
so he wouldn't have to
wrench the bow out of my hand,
his fingers fast as hummingbird wings.

"This is how it should be done,"
he'd say when he was through.

I wanted to do it myself,
to pull the line up gracefully,
zip the pond in half
the way you do,
hear the zing it makes
when I do it right,
a bird taking off
from a telephone wire.

The water was dark
when I first felt
the weightlessness,
felt the line lift
and heard you laugh
as I, carried away by the music,
began casting faster and faster,
practicing in double-time.