



# First Time Fishing

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This spring I was moving out four years of piles and  
stacks

When I remembered you and I sitting  
On chairs plastic and aged like primordial rock  
That asked for two hands to give.  
In a locked room within a locked room  
Frigid air formed our breath  
Befitting the coastal Long Island town

I always thought I'd lose the key, it wasn't mine  
Like the questions of a print out  
I can't seem to look away from  
This map towards multi-step assessments and protocols  
Wants a fifth iteration of your story  
You smile with pearls for teeth shining under your hoodie  
Because I have a key and I have a badge

That day you were walking down the street to the tracks  
Wondering if the ritualistic commuter would stop for you  
too  
Instead turned toward the stray cats calling  
And you were glad  
In that moment I felt a strong desire to become a cat person  
Who also conducts trains and rewrites childhoods and  
the past  
Instilling love so solid like earth  
Instead I nod to the following section  
Asking for any allergies to food or medications

This is my first time fishing  
My rod does not yet know  
Time and experience will shape its curve  
Over sea that can tumble rocks and stand still for a fly  
Awaiting seasoned catches of words and states of  
partnership  
At least for now  
I could tell you of a riddle  
From my fifth grade teacher  
I've mulled over for years

## Poet's Statement

This poem is about my first interview with a patient diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. I was a third-year medical student on my core psychiatry clerkship. I remember asking my patient a list of questions I had practiced, with a personal goal to conduct a thorough psychiatric review of systems, and thinking how my questions felt like they were asking for so much vulnerability from my patient. I remember feeling the weight of her pain of not wanting to live, and feeling uncertain of what words I could say next that could offer relief. As I stumbled through this initial encounter—which would over time lead to one my most rewarding patient relationships—I began learning how psychiatry is a dynamic field of transference and countertransference, of giving and receiving on both sides. I am learning that my patients and their experiences will inevitably evoke strong emotions in me, as well as the importance of acknowledging my own responses to patients' stories, pausing and reflecting, and entering each interaction with patients fully present to their reality.

## Declarations

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