



HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER

—after Paul Klee's "Fish Magic" (1925)

by Janet Ruth

All those scaley fish-memories . . . That time you took me along on the first day of trout season. Your favorite bend along a forgotten stream—the secret spot where *the fishing is best*. I had to bait my own hook with the wriggling worm. All was fine until the stream bank collapsed under my feet and I went splashing into the cold flow, my boots filled with water. You hauled me out, made me stand in them all morning because *you scared the fish and must have done it on purpose because you were bored*, which I hadn't but I was. Or vacation at Uncle Harold's cabin in the Poconos, where we got to stay up late angling for catfish by the light of a kerosene lantern. Tramping through the dark to that inlet along Lake Wallenpaupack where we sat on the bank staring into darkness. Dragging in slimy creatures from the muddy bottom—*watch out for those barbs on their whiskers!* We kept our catch in a bucket on the car port, with a rock on top of the lid. But a skunk, or a raccoon figured out how to get in anyway and made off with the prize. We practiced our casts in the back yard with a rod and rubber weight tied to the end of the line. A robin chased the bouncing target through grass as we reeled it in. Casts in real time got hooked—in trees—the opposite

bank—the row boat’s edge—the back of my shirt—thankfully not in anyone’s eye. Only one time, you took me along on a charter boat for blue fish—your favorite “deep-sea” adventure. You helped me catch one with reel and tackle attached to the deck chair. I’d pull up on the rod and reel in, dip the rod—*and don’t stop reeling!*—then pull up and reel some more. Somewhere—the picture of me standing proud with my catch. You showed me all the lures in your creel—telling me which one was good for what circumstance or which fish—all of which I promptly forgot. Some looked like minnows, some like worms, some more like cheap jewelry. You said they were just meant to catch the light and the attention of the fish. I preferred fishing with lures, which at least involved some action—casting and reeling back in. More interesting than casting out a worm on a hook with a weight, followed by just sitting and watching the bobber, waiting for it to dip . . . and waiting and waiting

--first published in *Unbroken: prose poems* (Issue #48, January 2026)