

BARRY DEMPSTER

## Take Care

*Take care*, you say into the phone,  
meaning *go on alone*.  
And here I thought caring grasped  
as close to heaven as one could get,  
some elbow grease and a sudden  
blueprint of veins. I swear it took  
actual physical presence to rub your back,  
to help you wash the mismatched dishes,  
to hold one of your poems between my fingers  
like a purple butterfly. Nerves, and pores,  
and bristling energy, whatever happened  
to being there, doing, stirring the pot?  
I think of hugs at the end of a letter,  
too small to even fit around my wrist.  
Love needs muscle and grip, collarbone  
sliding into collarbone, a penny  
of sweat on your neck. It takes every  
pound of you to hold me aloft,  
to rearrange my gravity. You need  
arms to really do the job, you need  
a chin, a steep hill of spine, a matching  
set of ankles keeping trust on its shaky feet.  
But go ahead, long for me from a distance,  
feel the miles tearing like tissue, popping  
bones from their sockets, spreading skin  
across the nothingness like a treasure map  
with X's stretched into fades. *Take care*.  
And here I thought you needed  
at least one of my thumbs to zip you up.