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# Change Partners and Dance

Allison Joseph

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## Change Partners and Dance · *Allison Joseph*

You will never write the perfect poem.  
It will remain inside, a slow boat,

a shimmering absolute that turns  
uncertain and recalcitrant in the brain,

growing ungainly as you set  
it to paper—going lank, loose,

cowardly—a succession of phrases  
you couldn't honor on your best day.

Forget it. Forget the drag and claim  
of what will not yield, what stays heavy

as millstone, constricting  
as tourniquet. Sit, instead, ruthless,

eager, pushing at boundaries,  
at junctions of synapses,

giving names to limits,  
to hesitations, to the breakneck

stutter of your human voice.  
Language didn't ask for you,

isn't waiting for you to carve it solid,  
to hack away until there's nothing

but truth, the heft and weight of it  
all you can offer up, send forth.

There are no prizes,  
no tests of pure worth,

nothing but you and this passion,  
an incredulous secret wonder

that cons you every day, a wink  
and a smile, a sideways shuffle

that swears you know the steps  
as something syncopated and Latin

rises from the orchestra, and Fred  
arrives in a slick tux, Ginger in a gown

that fans out and out, trailing sequins,  
lace, delicate and coquettish feathers.