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Learning to Dance

Fleda Brown Jackson

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Five Poems · *Fleda Brown Jackson*

LEARNING TO DANCE

When we waltzed with the senior citizens
at the Pappy Burnett Pavilion,
I felt how you moved slick as a cowboy,
my own rough bones clicking beside
you, trying to move the way trying can't
go. I loved you, turning in yourself
like a loose skin, and the woman
who danced with her broom, and the old man
round-dancing, his shirt open over
his heavy belly, an old, old grace
feeding him from the bass
of the country band. I've always
wanted to dance. Aspen leaves tambourine
in the wind, needles flare from the tamarack
branch like ballet skirts, and that
Wednesday of the Central Lake Pavilion Dance
travels miles in place, turning
and returning to its original dark.
Afterward, I pulled off my swimsuit in the lake
and held you next to me, learning
from your heart and the slap slap of waves
on stones. What is it wants us to know
where to step? Each pause
brings us tight against the mouth
of the earth, and then we raise one
foot like the flame of a candle.
Our bodies move in and out of the space
we've held to be true, and something else
sees each half turn as the whole dance.