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The Route We Take

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The Route We Take

1

The lake is a droop of space
and we are paddling in it,
remote and yearning.
An old man and woman start out
in their pontoon boat that sputters
weeds. We find them again,
farther on, fishing. The woman
has balanced her hips on a twig
of a chair. The man spits
at the water as if he has arrived
at exactly the right place.

2

A root floats up,
a gladiator's arm,
brown-studded, crooked.
Cut, it feels like cork,
or something you could
eat if you had to,
one thing standing for
another, and nothing
as horrible as it looks,
snaked underwater.

3

Two great blue heron jut
fantastically, pterodactyl-
beaked, carrying the sky
to a cold distance. The high
sun sinks its teeth
in the waves. We arch
our necks after the bird.
The last thing we want,
we tell ourselves, is
intelligence, or comfort.

4

Dick says they subpoenaed
the farmer who penned hogs
across a feeder-stream,
their raw fecal matter
launching out, greening.
We stop and wade to where
the cold appears invisible.
We actually drink from our
hands, praying for innocence.

5

We follow the mink along
the bank until it climbs
into the tangle of roots
where water has risen
and fallen. We see through
to clearings, stammers
of light, a few sharp red
cardinal flowers, a whole
network of traces, not ours.

6

A row of old docks slope
and dislodge like disproved
theories. We observe
the sequence
of them, heavy and frail.
Lily pads collect
at their feet to soften
the failure. The day
is full of sunshine. We have
our canoe, our traveling.

7

Toward evening, we
can almost see home
through the needle's eye
of the bridge:
Mile Point, our twelve
swans huddled, all
that is, seen and unseen,
all we keep learning
to care for because
we return to it
between extremities.

—Fleda Brown Jackson

Fleda Brown Jackson is a professor of English at the University of Delaware.