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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.
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.

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.