

# 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.

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.

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.

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