

Michael Milburn

First Steps

In the restaurant, you quietly finger your glass
as a man tries to accompany a woman
who cannot dance, whirling her kicking outward
on his arm and back until her feet
waltz powerless beneath his swaying body,

the way your dying father folded childlike
from your grasp, all slumping legs and nightshirt
on the bathroom floor, as his numb face
dragged away a smile. Cradling his head, you recalled
spring fishing where the morning glories

smothered Texas fields, the Gulf like glass,
and both of you silent, touring
with each other's perfect companion, or how he'd prop you up
beside him at the Legion bar
and drink himself into a tale or fight or simply spin you fast

away from him, flailing with great shrieks and laughs.

It always ended with your eyes
moistening his shoulder in a chair.

When the tourist couple bows and parts, the woman
touches up her gray bouffant, the man his checkered pants,

and you approach the floor, I drink to your father
and the room where you learned these steps, spinning
gloriously from his careful hands, as tonight,
unaccompanied, you bring down the house.