

SUSAN EDWARDS RICHMOND

Jitterbug

for John Cannon (1960-1998)

When the music starts and it's a fast swing,
all he taught comes flooding back, the toe heel
toe heel step step time that kept us spinning
and the duck beneath the arm before he
reeled us out and then back in again.
Bless those Southern manners, the way he'd make
us all look fine. He'd greet any woman
with a kiss, and guide her with his hand in
the small of the back, take his gin straight but
never let it get in the way. His face
always looked a little shattered, too much
drink or study or lack of sleep, except
when he was cutting up the floor. New York
was not North Carolina, though it must
have seemed like what he wanted, the street dance
of the crowds and constant music. Something
must have caught up with him there and kept on
going, something faster than a jitter-
bug in any college town. I wonder,
did he think of us then?—with his car parked
on the bridge—how we used to line up high
on the dance, for him, ready to be caught
and pulled back in from the spin or the dip,
our balance in his trembling, steady hand.