

Modern Dance Class · *Stephen Dunn*

The difficulties of grace.
How first the body must learn
the elementary extensions,
the possibilities it knew
as a child, unnatural now—
wacky as obedience lessons
for a cat.
The instructor looks at me
the way gas station attendants
look at tires whose treads are gone;
I imagine he's thinking "Oh
get a new one, a man could die
with a body like that."
I know grace
is what occurs after technique
has been loved a long while
and then forgotten.
So I take the steps,
I reach as far as I can reach.
My thighs are muscled
from sports in which opponents
were other than myself,
my arms have no history
of holding themselves in air
without bringing something back.
But I remember a fat girl
whose grace was the loveliness
with which she carried her burden.
I knew a stutterer whose poems
were sailboats and wind.
But I'm neither good
nor driven, I just want to be
magnificent as if by magic
the way a teenager does.
By now, the instructor has
turned his head, I'm his toad
among butterflies,
he can't bear to look.
I'm so wrong for this
in my leotard
I'm thinking my cock

is a nipple under a wet blouse,
everybody's staring at it,
my balls are Christmas
for the loneliest person in class.
Soon he calls it a day,
says "practice or stuff it"
and walks off.
I dress slowly, thinking how much better
I might have said that.