

My Cousin's Wife Brings My Aunt Home, Unexpectedly

She asks what I was doing
in Texas, wondering if I were like my aunt
who claimed her life was a country and western
song, that she left "all of her exes in Texas,"
though my aunt had no exes there, that I knew of,
her only boyfriend following her husband's death,
a wild French-Canadian I can barely remember,
beyond the photo of him with a shot gun and a moose's head
that kept her end table company, even years after
he no longer did the same favor for her.

She delivers a lament like no one
I know, choosing exactly the sort of memory
to embrace loss, reminding me how even in her seventies,
my mother's sister made the kids laugh, teaching them
how to do the Twist, and man, she could Twist the night away
maybe having learned to do it with her crazy French-Canadian
whose ears stuck out like open car doors--my aunt was
a serious twister in her day and even beyond.

She only has half the story, as is often
the case, when you marry into a family, not knowing,
for example, how my aunt politely explained
to a disabled reservation man that it was
not a good thing to look in the bedroom windows of widowed
women, then as he left her thermo-pane
for the last time, how she grabbed
the neighborhood tomcat by the tail, the one
that always tried to break into her
house whenever she opened the door
and flung it yards away, instructing it
to "Never come back, fucker," laughing
to herself, despite her better judgment,
as the man jumped
a little, reaching the road.

She had never seen
the photograph we lost in the fire of my aunt,
taken sometime in the '50s, wearing a long,
tight-fitting dress patterned in black and white
horizontal stripes, an outfit we called
her "hamburglar dress," after that McDonald's
commercial character, because we refused to see
her that far back in the past, a beautiful reservation
woman in a provocative outfit, ready
to twist at a moment's notice, should the right man
come along, knowing as we would
know into the future, that she would
love twice, maybe even three times, but that she would
be alone at the end.

She receives no answer
from me, as her question merely opens doors for us
to remember the ways my aunt was
more exotic and alive than the Twist,
and certainly more dangerous than a country
and western song, and there, for that moment, we have
brought her back, each in our own ways.

originally published in *Many Mountains Moving*