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## *Fleda Brown Jackson*

### ELVIS GOES TO THE ARMY

“Goodby, you long black sonofabitch,” he says  
to his limo as he climbs on the bus to basic training.  
The U.S. Army has him on the scales, then,  
in his underpants, baby-fat showing, mouth downturned  
in sorrow or fear. Not that we should make him out  
a martyr, but he could be losing his career, here,  
and he could have gotten out of this. It is  
worth noting, when a person leaves his mama  
and his singing behind and gives over to the faint signals  
picked up by his inner ear. So what if the signal  
in a particular case is mundane: the unremarkable  
desire for love, for lack of ambiguity.  
He’s more alert than he’s ever been, time clicking  
away with the greater ritual’s small appointments:  
dressing and undressing, tightening bedcovers, reciting  
the valuable gun, becoming part of the diorama  
where danger is everywhere, a good reason to blend  
khaki with the earth. Now, thirty years later, uniforms  
are back in favor, following the lead of the Catholic  
children in navy and white, soldiers of God  
and high-scorers on SATs alike, sure  
of their place in the universe. “This is the Army, son”:  
even a King like Elvis might hear that  
and relax at last between what’s come before  
and what will be: the dead hair of the past  
buzzed off in a second, the skull of the future  
rising under a battalion of stubs that hope  
to live up to the example of the fallen. We will not laugh  
at the shorn head, but will consider a long time  
the incomprehensibility of our desires, and the way  
we beg ritual to take them off our hands.