

Gibbon Ballroom

we went there to dance
almost every saturday night
we had to I swear
it was written down somewhere
like a decree from the council of trent

and there were my father's friends
with their shiny music bands
donny morris
johnny helget
harold loefelmacher and the six jolly dutchmen
those lederhosen-clad yodelers
in jaeger hats with their accordions and horns
singing and whooping singing and whooping
whoop whoop whoop whoop

the polka the waltz
foxtrot
and the schottische

except for the waltzing
which requires elegance
this kind of music was easy to dance to
you just hop step
twirl and laugh
in someone's arms

it was for fun

because while armies clashed in the night
the way armies do clash in the night
the pursuit of ordinary pleasure
in the gibbon ballroom
gave space to forgive each other's trespasses
and forget our personal woes

we loved the long and wide stretch
of maple flooring
how giddy we felt stepping on to it
how flush our faces were

in the happy low-key glamour
in a country not oversupplied with it
but too the may-I-have-this-dance
punished shy and unsure men
women too polite to say no
and those who wanted it perfect
but waited too long

someone gutted the ballroom
turned it into a supermarket
which became a bingo parlor
that shifted into a sticky
carpeted thrift store
until someone gutted that

now it's used as a storage shed for road graders
skid steers and snow plows

but while it was the gibbon ballroom
with its roaming aromas
of hairspray and soap
cologne and smoke
floor polish and beer

where the boys did the same two steps
to every dance only slower
or faster

there was laughter
so much laughter

and we could be whatever we wanted to be
leaders loners knights and starlets
or villains and spies like the swivel-eyed
aunts and grannies who scrutinized
the hum of our breathlessness
as they always did
back when we were young

— Jeanne Lutz

[Read the story of Gibbon Ballroom,
Gibbon, Minnesota](#)

