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Needy Relatives

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Needy Relatives

Dust

It wipes a dark hand across the unused
Surfaces of love, fixes on sill and lid,

Or wafts a slow descent in afternoon sun
As the house sleeps,—exposed to no one.

But we know its presence like a body
In the closet, the exclusions of a will.

With it too has reticence become habit,
Silent as an old feud squatting on heirlooms.

—Distinctly it has the family nose,
And the same posture of indifference. . .

This gray fellow settles in with a laugh:
The blackguard cousin home again, for keeps.

Earth

We feel it pulling at sleeve and boot,
Its little whine, the pleading that sickens,

Unabashed appeals to fill its purse
With coins of eye and bone. *The old debt,*

It whispers, snuggling its gape of a mouth
Up to our necks. We have to dread

That kiss, the dank breath, drabness it wears
Like bulky coats from a Goodwill rack,

Dark, cumbersome. And the crude jewels of summer,
Glowing like dimstore glass, the gay fringe

Of green, the plaintive gesture of fingers
Waving like hope from beneath the family tree.

Night

The old blackmailer arrives as we dream,
His pockets bulging with dark secrets.

This one says nothing, his language the blank
Stare of the truly needy. When he crooks

His dirty fingers, hands gaping like pits,
Even paupers empty their coffers,

And kings throw down their treasures before him,
And girls their young beauty—never enough

For one whose wants are legion, his hunger
Raging like villains, desire a great hole

Of black: his tent pitched in enemy camp,
His kinsmen turning in sleep from him.