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Visitation

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Visitation

Once again,
We visit the aged ones.
Yes, kicking and screaming
Up dingy cat-strewn stairs
Into musty, memory-clogged parlors
Graveyards of overstuffed victorian furniture—
Where ancient voices
Retell and retell and retell
The same "When-I-was-Youngs"
Always to the irregular rhythm
Of old rocking, creaking bones...

The stench of feline foulness
Is as thick as molasses.
The sturdy oak tables lie buried
Under mounds of moldy hat-boxes
And paper-clip collections
And unfinished quilts
And stacks of yellowed yesterdays...

Everywhere
The faded stare
Of fish-eyed family portraits,
Long-since-dead relatives
Like photographic phantoms
Lurk about the rooms...

Occasionally,
Through the dark and heavy
Gloom,
An anywhere bound locomotive whistle
Calls from far away,
Filling your mind with a maddening desire
For freedom...

Yet,
Finally at hand—
After the cringing, humiliating
Farewell hugs—
Salvation.
And on the long journey home
Dotted by sparse conversation
And heavy sighs—
Only one black thought—

When our days,
Too,
Will be marked in the rhythm
Of old rocking, croaking bones
And the deafening tick-tock
Of a mantle clock
That pulls us one step
Closer to the grave.