

Distress Sale

Early one Sunday morning everything outside –
the child's canopy bed and vanity table,
the sofa, end tables and lamps, boxes
of assorted books and records. We carried out
kitchen items, a clock radio, hanging
clothes, a big easy chair
with them from the beginning
and which they called Uncle.
Lastly, we brought out the kitchen table itself
and they set up around that to do business.
The sky promises to hold fair.
I'm staying here with them, trying to dry out.
I slept on that canopy bed last night.
This business is hard on us all.
It's Sunday and they hope to catch the trade
from the Episcopal church next door.
What a situation here! What disgrace!
Everyone who sees this collection of junk
on the sidewalk is bound to be mortified.
The woman, a family member, a loved one,
a woman who once wanted to be an actress,

she chats with fellow parishioners who
smile awkwardly and finger items
of clothing before moving on.
The man, my friend, sits at the table
and tries to look interested in what
he's reading – Froissart's *Chronicles* it is,
I can see it from the window.
My friend is finished, done for, and he knows it.
What's going on here? Can no one help them?
Must everyone witness their downfall?
This reduces us all.
Someone must show up at once to save them,
to take everything off their hands right now,
every trace of this life before
this humiliation goes on any longer.
Someone must do something.
I reach for my wallet and that is how I understand it:
I can't help anyone.

SALE

For sale: by order of the remaining heirs
Who ran up and down the big center stairs
The what-not, the settee, the Chippendale chairs
–And an attic of horrors, a closet of fears.

The furniture polished and polished so grand,
A stable and paddock, some fox-hunting land,
The summer house shaped like a village band stand
–And grandfather's sinister hovering hand.

The antimacassar for the sofa in red,
The Bechstein piano, the four-poster bed,
The library used as a card room instead
–And some watery eyes in a Copley head.

The dining room carpet dyed brighter than blood,
The table where everyone ate as he should,
The sideboard beside which a tall footman stood
–And a fume of decay that clings fast to the wood.

The hand-painted wall-paper, finer than skin,
The room that the children had never been in,
All the rings and the relics encrusted with sin
–And the taint in a blood that was running too thin.