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# Claiming Kin

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## CLAIMING KIN

Insistent as a whistle, her voice up  
the stairs pried open the blanket's  
tight lid and piped me  
down to the pressure cooker's steam and rattle.  
In my mother's kitchen, the hot iron  
spit on signal, the vacuum  
cleaner whined and snuffled.  
Bright face and a snazzy apron,  
clicking her long spoons,  
how she commandeered the razzle-dazzle!

In the front room I dabbed  
the company chairs with a sullen rag  
(Father's drawers—nothing  
wasted). Pale lump blinking  
at the light, I could hear her sing  
in her shiny kingdom: the sound  
drifted out like a bottled message.  
It was the voice of a young girl  
who stopped to gather cool moss, forgetting  
the errand, spilling the cornmeal,  
and cried and cried in her bearish papa's ear.

At night, while I flopped  
like a fish on grandma's spool bed,  
up from her bed and my wheezing  
father she rose to the holly,  
flat-leaf and Virginia Creeper.  
Soft ghost, plush as a pillow,  
she wove and fruited against the black hours:  
red berries and running cedar, green signatures  
on the table, on the mantle.

Mother, this poem is from your middle  
child who, like your private second self,  
rising at night to wander the dark house,  
grew in the shady places:  
a green plant in a brass pot,  
rootbound, without blossoms.