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The Elders

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THE ELDERS

I go to Great Troubles.
Bareheaded,
I visit them first thing in the morning.
Their gloomy servant ushers me in.
I, the poor cousin—
They, my benefactors
Standing with their stovepipe hats
In a circle of splendid bloodhounds,
In a circle of sharp-nosed women.

The rain is pouring down, the rain . . .
Inside, their steps are slow, arthritic.
A slight greeting and I'm shown into the corner
Where I sit watching their pale hands,
Their hands with many tiny blue veins,
With many long and sharp fingernails,
While the curtains billow and billow
As if birds, as if large birds were caught in them.

Sights that make everyone sigh,
Except for me, interested as I am
Only in their beautiful daughter
Who touched me on the way in
With the same finger
That will soap her breasts:
In the evening,
When the lights are low.