The Poem Dresses up like Love

Earnest Sandeen
THE POEM IS SHOWING

Slowly, without embarrassment, 
the poem composes the candles on the sideboard 
to show how mortal our hands are, 
putting down or picking up a glass, 
fingering among the hors d’oeuvres, 
or touching a friend’s shoulder.

In the twilight of table lamps 
and floor lamps which the poem invents 
for the next room, how sadly 
our skeletons show through 
as we stand or sit, conversing 
with a certain animation.

THE POEM DRESSES UP LIKE LOVE

The poem contrives to look as old 
as love itself, Sappho in Merlin’s white beard. 
It questions the glum lover: So how did 
your story end? I told her I was leaving her. 
I couldn’t tell her I knew she was leaving 
me for her new lover. Your pride, was it? 
(Stroking the beard.) My pride, yes. And besides 
I didn’t want her to hurt, even a little.

You ungrateful egotist, mutters the venerable 
poem, you could have left her a small gift 
of her guilt. What if she wants to remember you?