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Portrait of My Sister

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Portrait of My Sister / Burt Blume

She stayed in her room
all day, and no one could hear her.
She wanted air.
She looked out the window
to a lake. Two people
were on a dock, inspecting a canoe.
From the outside she was almost
a picture, standing at her window.
It was the most we ever saw of her.

She had journals, scrapbooks, broken
needles, spools of white thread.
She had an ell of ancient linen.
She had everything we could not give her.
She wanted air.
Her finest clothes were patchwork,
confusions of desire. The rest
were black and she did not wear them.

She wanted air. We were
given to know that she was mad.
We rarely spoke of her outside the family,
no one came up the lawns to ask of her.
The years passed on, left her speechless,
trying to squeeze the light
from her eyes. The sun grew smaller
out of boredom. Her shadows remained
detailing her every move.

What could we promise her?
The moon in a teak box,
a fist of doubt, the power
to turn from reason, some faith—
She had everything we could not give her.
Lying at her window, unravelling
a prediction of cloud
she wanted air.