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The History of Air, Part 1

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SANDRA MEEK

The History of Air, Part 1

Once there was a *once*, a story
she added each night to
until the calendar slipped
from the wall, her blood running

away from my hand's small pressure
stroking hers, spilling back
like grape juice down a straw
a child plays, not
drinking—

Her room's fluorescence
bays the dark beyond
the doorknob she could turn,
once, when constellations glittered
until she clicked them
off behind blinds underscoring
the night she no longer

distinguishes from morning.
She could field
any midnight's lightning,
then, before the question
swept to the back of her brain
wine-stained her skull
with the jewel of a continent

she'd never travel, all
but the purple cap of veins pulling
away from I swear the

shrinking bone. I stroke
her hollowing brow; cradle
the ivory knob topping

her spine's pebbled
bow of smoke, memorizing
the fragrance of her strawberry-yogurt moan

as they turn her, the poise
of the oxygen canister in the corner, its bomb-
like mechanism sealed
off as the room's perpetual machine
purrs on—

Perfect pitch
lies in the bone, the flute
and whorl of it: the body a tuning fork
struck into sound even as language
abandons her—*We swam over lakes, over big thick strings
of water*—for a stammer

in her wrist; the small hiss
of a dowsing-rod nosepiece
gifting her what she
can no longer take
in, the upstaging
air, a magician's last *poof*
as dry ice pours crematorium smoke
into velvet stage curtains, like clapping
two erasers, all chalk

and muffling, as into the pillow
beneath her I could almost,
almost—