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SHARON OLDS

MY POEM WITHOUT ME IN IT

My poem without me in it—would it be like
my room when I had returned to it
after my mother was done with me.
Under my bed, only the outer
space balls, of dust, only
the asteroids of hair, no bent-legs
spider drawstring purse, no fly, no
I. My poem without me in it, would it
be like her house before I was granted
the right to close my door—it had been one
hive, one queen five times my size, her
long stomach lolling like a tucker-bag.
My poem without me—like the mahogany
bookcase, with its spiral pillars,
without a book by a woman in it.
My poem without
a simile in it. My poem like my head, as a child, when I learned
how not to have
a thought in it,
in case it were a thought one would burn for.
My poem without this ordinary female
in it—like the body politic
of a teenage woman without her special
blood in it. This old girl's
poem without a girl in it.
I have been a child without a soul.
The poem is a vale of soul-making.