

Going back to the beginning

I see a room  
there's a lot of white –  
sheets, nuns' habits, walls

someone is holding a baby  
wrapped in light cotton –  
it's very hot

there's a waiting in the room  
an uncertainty –  
now a second baby comes  
she's breathing  
just

a nurse wraps her up, whisks her  
to a tented crib, oxygen –  
she'll often get sick  
in confined places like cars  
after this

soon she can breathe ok  
but it's many weeks  
before this little one  
feels her sister's body  
next to her again  
she is mostly alone now  
not often touched

2  
the doctors say  
she's not big enough to go home  
they hear her cries  
ask the nuns to quieten her  
don't see how much she is losing  
while she gains weight

later my mother will talk about  
how much my sister and I – the smaller one –  
cried when we were babies  
she or my father would have to stay with us  
in the car when they visited people  
we screamed if they took us out