

Fishbones

Each day, all thumbs, I braid my daughter's hair:
I can manage two bunches, one each side,
but it's much more difficult to part it
neatly into three and to work for that one thick plait
she loves down her back. As for fishbones and French
braiding! She begs me to try; and I promise that when
my thumbs have turned to fingers, I'll have a go.
Out in the garden, onions push their stubborn way
through gaudy tulips. It's easy to make mistakes:
they were all just bulbs when my mother planted them!
Forget-me-nots twine intricate designs — a fantasy
of reds, greens, and blues, — between runner beans.
I pull them apart with clumsy fingers, yet they knot
like tangles, fresh each day, in my youngster's hair.
Last winter, a heavy snowfall toppled the garden wall.
Bricks and mortar litter the grass in untidy piles.
I hold my child by an arm and a leg and swing her round,
faster and faster till, dizzy, she can hardly stand.
Now she staggers like my father who stumps on two front
sticks and jabs at the wall he wants me to rebuild.
Spittle dribbles from slackened jaw. He claws, with twisted
hand, at words, like fishbones, stuck in his throat.

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