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Brushing My Daughter's Hair

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Charlotte Pence

BRUSHING MY DAUGHTER'S HAIR

My daughter tells me I hurt her
every day. My comb tangles in
insults intricate as wedding lace.
I kiss-touch-brush her bangs,
yet the tense tangles grow
throughout the morning rush.
She yowls the loudest when
I slice the scalp with a part.
I forge ahead, blitz her toast
with butter, bite my bitter coffee,
slit the milk carton's throat.
Meant to embolden,
my sing-song battle cry
of *practice-makes-perfect; try*
again; let's repeat . . .
thins her self-worth.
But I cannot part with
this comb that promises
clean lines and perfection.
This plastic line of teeth is all bite,
no bark. My house is a hive
of buzzing braids, of work
and rinse, curls and cull-downs,
where my daughter and I
wrestle at the nape of our neck,
a French knot, a choke hold,
all the hands my own.