

Nitty Gritty

Love makes your scalp itch / I know because I've combed / week after week / each strand of their lovely heads / unloosened pony tails / tugged and pulled / from root to tip / to clean unplaited hanks / of crawling lice / their unhatched eggs / the weapon of my choice / a metal close-toothed comb / that digs and scratches / I've watched a louse / belly fat with blood / climb up a golden thread / snapped its back / with my thumbnail / in a satisfying crack / my daughters wrapped in towels / one sitting on the bath / chemical shampoo / dripping down her neck / the other knelt in front of me / fidgeting and crying / wanting to go to bed / this is love's nitty-gritty / compelling me to do / what must be done / like the cycle of a fairy-tale / those lovely heads / tipped from side to side / to catch the light / as though I'm pouring stories in their ears / the louse that laid a hundred golden eggs / the girls whose tangled hair betrayed them / the mother who raked pins through their scalp / a close-toothed comb that keeps its secrets / the never-endingness of it / the need to scratch an itch / a story starting up again