

Ordinary Heartbreak

She climbs easily on the box
That seats her above the swivel chair
At adult height, crosses her legs, left ankle over right,
Smooths the plastic apron over her lap
While the beautician lifts her ponytail and laughs,
"This is coarse as a horse's tail."
And then as if that's all there is to say,
The woman at once whacks off and tosses
its foot and a half into the trash.

And the little girl who didn't want her hair cut,
But long ago learned successfully how not to say
What it is she wants,
Who, even at this minute cannot quite grasp
her shock and grief,
Is getting her hair cut. "For convenience," her mother put it.
The long waves gone that had been evidence at night,
When loosened from their clasp,
She might secretly be a princess.

Rather than cry out, she grips her own wrist
And looks to her mother in the mirror.
But her mother is too polite, or too reserved,
So the girl herself takes up indifference,
While pain follows a hidden channel to a deep place
Almost unknown in her,
Convinced as she is, that her own emotions are not the ones
her life depends on,
She shifts her gaze from her mother's face
Back to the haircut now,
So steadily as if this short-haired child were someone else.

David Levine