

Anya Silver

Girl Braiding Her Hair

Albert Anker (1887)

A girl plaits her hair, a bowl of water
and an open book on the table beside her.
She's fair as my sister and I were,
when we sat still and felt our mother's
skillful hands tugging at our scalps
as she wove the fine, flaxen strands
into ropes hanging down our backs.
Her fingers read our hair like Braille.
Still, we gave up braiding early,
preferring the lazy ponytail.

But this girl, the room's darkness
dissolving in her hair's pale sheen,
knows the strength of a three-fold cord.
From three, her hands weave one.
From the flood past her waist, she crafts
a channel; from the field, she hews a furrow.
Serene, her fingers move through segments
(Left, right, left. Left, right, left),
each twist a calling to order she's answered.