Emily Dickinson's Writing Table in Her Bedroom at the Homestead, Amherst, Mass.

Sharon Olds

The chair next to her writing table is the chair my parents tied me to that day. Not the same chair, but a cousin of it, a Hitchcock from Connecticut, factory beside sluice gates through which shad leap, rubefacted with roe. My cervical vertebra feels the peneblum. My swayback sways away from the lower bar, and I can almost still feel, with my buttocks, the maze of glazed string in the seat. My wrists do not remember being tied to the struts rising from the seat, it makes me uneasy to try to remember that. But I remember the alphabet soup she fed me, the pleasure of being spoon-fed, I wanted to read each dense message as if it were falling, intelligible manna. When I was alone in the room I would drift...I had never been without pencil or paper – no scissors, no Scotch tape. I would sing, sometimes, loaf-shaped quatrains from the hymnal, but when someone approached I'd be silent. When my father came in, I wonder what it was like for him to come into a room with his child tied to a chair in it, I think he liked it, I think it felt right to him, he had great faith in me. I would be a chair that grew up and spoke well and went to his college. I was the maple they tapped, troughed, I was their Druid, they trusted me, they knew if there was to be sweetness ever come out of that house, it would have to come from me.