Black, white, just right

Mama’s face is chestnut brown.
Her dark brown eyes are bright as bees.
Papa’s face turns pink in the sun;
his blue eyes squinch up when he smiles.

My face? I look like both of them—
a little dark, a little light.
Mama and Papa say, “Just right!”

Black is the color of Mama’s hair,
crinkly, curling around her face.
Papa’s hair is popcorn colored,
short and straight and silky-smooth.

My hair? Halfway in-between—
a dark brown ponytail tied tight.
Three in the mirror—we look just right!

Mama and I take ballet lessons,
twirling, leaping, light as moths.
Papa likes to dance to rap,
stomp and wiggle to the street-smart beat.
My feet? They never want to stop!
I’m Papa’s jitterbug—boom, bamty, boom!
I’m Mama’s butterfly—arms wide in flight.
We all clap and say, “Just right!”

When Mama walks along the street,
her high-heeled shoes click click—fast.
Papa likes to dawdle, stroll,
make faces in the window glass.

My speed? I race like a rabbit,
then let my toes drag turtle-slow.
Mama sighs. “We don’t have all night!”
Swift or slow, I say, “Just right!”

Mama says, “I’d like a kitten,
plump and gray all fur and purr.”
Papa wants a Saint Bernard—
too bad that we don’t have a yard!

And me? Give me dozens of pets:
cats and dogs, flat fish, fat frogs.
I’d make sure they didn’t fight.
A whole pet store would be just right!

Mama stares at African masks,
curved drums, carved figures made of wood.
Papa goes for modern art,
all squiggles, squares, and stretched-out shapes.

My choice? Huge Egyptian tombs,
with painted faces, picture words,
and cloth-wrapped mummies wound up tight.
Touring the museum is just right!

Mama has to stretch her arms to reach the subway straps. She’s small! Papa grins, “Hey, I’m six feet tall. Watch me—I can reach the moon!”

My size? I’m still inching up. When grown, will I be small or tall? Mama says, “Whatever your height, we know you’ll measure up just right!”

Mama’s hands are smooth and quick at fixing zippers, tying bows. Papa’s hands are hard and large, strong enough to boost me high.

My hands? Halfway in-between—small and hard with rough-chewed nails. Walking down the street at night, holding hands feels just right!

Marguerite W. Davol
Black, white, just right
Chicago, Albert Whitman & Company, 1993