



Vincent van Gogh,
'Windmills on
Montmartre', 1886.

I take your daughter to the windmill

Tabby Hayward

— or she

takes me, her starfish-hand suckered in mine.
We are talking about princesses. We've been told
there is no-one in the windmill, yet now above
the cackle of the crickets, shrill and witchy, we hear

the human voices. They invite us in, like any fairytale,
and we go up, the staircase tightly wound, near vertical.
She's clasped to my hip, little bear, but her arms
are everywhere and the steps are smooth and steep, so I speak

brightly about princesses and towers, making myself firm,
the jut of my shoulder and hip, a prow, a rocking ship,
up and up to the window, where she waves and says
something only you would understand. And then, at last —

'Where's Mummy?' You're sitting down below, just out of sight;
so might as well be in another world. It's worse
on the way down; the steps slanting away like sea-bit cliffs;
her dancing weight and my uncertain feet. How do mothers live?

It's been too long to think now why we're friends. Unlikely
as the windmill keeper's laugh — our odd shared-humour,
tough and blunt — your daughter's queenly 'Yus'.

.....

Tabby Hayward