

First three words

by [Julia Spicher Kasdorf](#) in the [September 23, 2020](#) issue

At thirteen months Ben can say *Ma Ma, Da Da*  
and *Fa Fa*, which he watches his father create

in a wood stove each day to heat their home.  
Tonight Ben rocks beside the iron box chanting

*Fa Fa* as softly as flames draw light from paper,  
then drops his head and charges to the kitchen

to point toward the range's burners: *Fa Fa*.  
When I tip a foiled pot of tulips

to his face, he finds no name for what lifts  
his spirit: *Aah Aah*, his cheek, fingertips,

*Aah*, his lips against those yellow petals!  
*Gentle, gentle* coos *Ma Ma* as he strains

to cradle the blooms without crushing them,  
his delight so pure he might burst into flame.