

**Stephen Robertson**

## **Childsplay**

Later, age maybe eight or ten,  
I would play competitive games  
in the vast (as it felt) asphalt playground  
just across the road  
from the Victorian turrets  
of the Natural History museum.

You take turns to flick your marble  
across the asphalt.  
If you hit your friend's marble  
it's yours to keep.

But long before that  
there was a wooden run.  
A post at either end,  
five grooved sloping rails,  
a tray at the base.

You put the marble in at the top;  
it runs down the groove  
into a hole in the post.  
A satisfying click, then it runs  
down the next groove, finally  
dropping into the bottom tray.

Of course you try  
many marbles at a time.  
Sometimes they jam  
and you must release them  
by poking your finger  
into the hole.

The run was already old, dark green  
paint slowly decaying  
under the fingers of the six of us.  
Sometimes more damage—  
break and repair, break and repair—  
occasional work for a handyman.

That is now my role—  
making the necessary repairs  
for a generation of grandchildren.