

from 'Brother Poem'

Brother

there's a road I have to walk down
and I don't know what's at the end of it
and all we have between us

1 bar of soap
1 babybel
1 yoyo

In the first memory I have
Dad rolls a cigarette
steerwheel between his knees when
a cricket wings beating
flings itself against
the dashboard headrest windscreen

and I strain against my harness
screaming *stop*
baccy flying as he swerves
across two lanes

I can hear those legs *crrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr*
in my head
I can't see to see
but my brother eyes wide
holds his hands out
patiently

Though we couldn't
know it we could feel it
that lull before
two stars collide
Dad first then Mum
but hiding in the pipes
under the sink
mighty
molecules we were
our every action as
beautiful or
indistinct
as the globules
in a lava lamp

give it back to me give it back
give me it give it to me give it
back give it back to me give it

gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
gaaaaaaaaaaaa
gaaaaaaaaaaaa
gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
gaaaaaaaaaaaa
gaaaaaaaaaaaa
gaaaaaaaaaaaa
ga
ga
ga

take it take it
take it take it take
it take it take it

Brother
it's a funny
word to say or
to address to you as if
you were here because if you were
I wouldn't be saying it that's what's funny

Brother
more a question
than a name with the
implication being do you have a brother
what does your brother do where is your brother

Brother
a frozen word
like being on the other
side of a locked door one of
those walk-in freezers where they
hang big slabs of meat *brrrrr* I'm outside
standing by the air-tight door whispering through
each steel hinge what was that you'll have to speak up
I can't hear a word you're saying no I can't hear anything

BROTHER
BROTHER
BROTH-
before I knew your
face or name
I saw the moons
of spring
fatal moons
which for days
on end became
whatever was most
unkind till
in a voice so
in a shapeless
flame an image
in excelsis came
and clear enough
to make the old
world groan

there you were
open and sublime
a bundle
of saliva waiting
to be kissed



Brother did we really
communicate as
particles we shrank
down to the size of

going unseen as we
raced between
the stacked plates
vibrating fast enough

to make the dust

just dance dance
just above the blue
surface of the sofa

On the wrong side of the glass that day
the doors slid shut
and off we went
 you never cried
 but that day
your round face white with fear
 mirrored mine
I ran back to find you
 sitting on the shoulders
of a tall white man

and you cried at the sight of me as if
you knew I meant to carry you away
which of course I did

On the first night I stood
in front of the bathroom
mirror chanting

BROTHER
BROTHER
BROTH-

but a trapped animal noise
echoed off the tiles
and took me by the arm
and I jumped back into bed

On the second night
I stood there again each bead
of sweat on my neck moonlit
wet hair combed back

BROTHER
BROTHER
BROTH-

And when I exhaled
a glass pitcher smashed
in the kitchen but Mum
wouldn't believe me

On the third night

BROTHER
BROTHER
BROTHER

I spoke plainly and waited
in a silence so deep I knew
you must be listening
but you wouldn't speak

so I leaned over the sink and
drank straight from the tap

Look look
I said
I can't

This is what
it looks like

I take
you take

but not from
the same place



My collection of stones
kept carefully wrapped
in a Clarks shoebox
under the stairs a dozen
different coloured gems
pink green lilac all
mine not yours but I
let you hold them even
my favourite rose quartz
which you said you'd
seen before me though
only after you lost it

You came to me as three
white lakes each whiter
than the other this is how
my mind goes when

I look at the sky

I call the captain
tall my face and lie down
by the water brother

you know I know
nothing

One day we came to a man singing
outside his front door

No said Mum
he doesn't live there that's where
his mum lived when she was alive
that's why he's singing there

Every poem is another
poem that didn't make it

that in trying to write
the liquid crystal of my
eye shut out

behind whose silence
crackles the poem
I could be writing

which in writing takes
the place of you

Mum near Covent Garden
dragging her feet after work
buys a top she'll never wear
and trudges home to find us
sitting in front of the tv
cottage pie back in the oven
whatever it was
that crossed her mind
transposed
rage solo
at a different pitch
low enough to be

inaudible we turn
the volume up
still light at half 8
the curtains drawn

The first poem I wrote was in my
mind
looking outside while
my parents
fought my brother hiding
under the bed

a paleblue thought in our
mother's mind moving too fast
to be caught

Between the devil and
the deep of Dad's snore
Mum's teeth gnashing

Between the deep blue
domes of two dead jellyfish
the sound wave of your breath

Low low pillow clutched
tightly to my ears every
evening sleeptime comes
and all the bands go drum

Grow grow let me grow
like mighty Robogoat
and if I get a wink tonight let
my dreams be numb

Woe woe willow boat
carry me away high

above the angry sky where
life is but a crumb

I liked the mist
but we agreed it
was a bad day
for a beach trip
all the windows
rolled down low
small droplets
of ice in her eyes

Our snapped off shadows
made a simple shape
one within the other like
a folded napkin and you
talked to me in your real

voice I wanted to make
the dust just no I couldn't
couldn't see us all there
eating instant noodles
sitting in front of the tv

From Beaver Creek
to Uplift we shot
anything that moved
the birds singing
in the artificial
trees the true self
nothing more than
the self as seen

Brother you wanted the red
spade but you were
too small to swim and Mum
wouldn't let me go in without it

That autumn I picked a red
felt-tip pen and made a circle
with a curling line attached

A neighbour had been giving
or receiving singing lessons
and they sounded like a couple
arguing

 Do re mi!
 shouted one
the other spat in his eye

A panda walks into a bar
eats a sandwich then kills
a man and I'm sitting
two stools down when the
bartender asks why did you
do that and the panda
leans over and kills him
too

Then the next day the panda
walks into the bar again I
happen to be in the cloakroom
looking for your scarf trying
to understand these recurring
dreams in which you return
to me dressed as a panda
sit down and pull out a gun
but I'm waiting outside
our house aged six thunder
in the pavement tree

Brother the night was
full and on my lips no
stars but names where
the dead leaf fell there
did it rest and the tree
being one leaf less
words filled the gap

Brother I talked to all
the dead whose names
were mine I talked
till there was no one
left I talked in you
and you in me till sleep
talked through us
both be with me be

Another bad year
moving backwards
turning as poets
turn from what it
was had moved us

Will Harris

Will Harris is a London-based writer. He is the author of the poetry books *RENDANG* (2020) and *Brother Poem* (2023), both published by Granta in the UK and by Wesleyan University Press in the US, and the essay 'Mixed-Race Superman' (Peninsula) which came out in 2018.

He has won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection and been shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. He co-translated Habib Tengour's *Consolatio* (Poetry Translation Centre) with Delaina Haslam in 2022, and helps facilitate the Southbank New Poets Collective with Vanessa Kisuule.

A recording of this text can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

© Will Harris