Half-caste

Excuse me
standing on one leg
I'm half-caste

5 Explain yuself
wha yu mean
when you say half-caste
yu mean when picasso
mix red an green
is a half-caste canvas/

10 explain yuself
wha yu mean
when yu say half-caste
yu mean when light an shadow
mix in de sky

15 is a half-caste weather/
well in dat case
england weather
nearly always half-caste
in fact some o dem cloud

20 half-caste till dem overcast
so spiteful dem dont want de sun pass
ah rass/
explain yuself
wha yu mean

25 when you say half-caste
yu mean tchaikovsky
sit down at dah piano
an mix a black key
wid a white key

30 is a half-caste symphony/

Explain yuself
wha yu mean
Ah listening to yu wid de keen
half of mih ear

35 Ah lookin at yu wid de keen
half of mih eye
and when I'm introduced to yu
I'm sure you'll understand
why I offer yu half-a-hand

40 an when I sleep at night
I close half-a-eye
consequently when I dream
I dream half-a-dream
an when moon begin to glow

45 I half-caste human being
cast half-a-shadow
but yu must come back tomorrow
wid de whole of yu eye
an de whole of yu ear

50 an de whole of yu mind

an I will tell yu
de other half
of my story

John Agard
Parade's End

Dad parked our Granada, champagne-gold
by our superstore on Blackstock Road,
my brother's eyes scanning the men
who scraped the pavement frost to the dole,
one 'got on his bike' over the hill
or the few who warmed us a thumbs-up
for the polished recovery of our re-sprayed car.

Council mums at our meat display
nestled against a pane with white trays
swilling kidneys, liver and a sandy block
of corned beef, loud enough about the way
darkies from down south Come op ta
Yorksha, mekkin claaims on aut teh can
befoh buggrin off in teh flash caahs!

At nine, we left the emptied till open,
clicked the dials of the safe. Bolted
two metal bars across the back door
(with a new lock). Spread trolleys
at ends of the darkened aisles. Then we pressed
the code for the caged alarm and rushed
the precinct to check it was throbbing red.

Thundering down the grafitti of shutters
against the valley of high-rise flats.
Ready for the getaway to our cul-de-sac'd
semi-detached, until we stood stock-still:
watching the car-skin pucker, bubbling smarts
of acid. In the unstoppable pub-roar
from the John O'Gaunt across the forecourt,

We returned up to the shop, lifted a shutter,
queued at the sink, walked down again.
Three of us, each carrying pans of cold water.
Then we swept away the bonnet-leaves
from gold to the brown of our former colour.

Daljit Nagra
Belfast Confetti

Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining exclamation marks.
Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the explosion.
Itself - an asterisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst of rapid fire.
I was trying to complete a sentence in my head but it kept stuttering.
All the alleyways and side streets blocked with stops and colons.

I know this labyrinth so well - Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman, Odessa Street -
Why can’t I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea Street. Dead end again.
A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-talkies. What is

Ciaran Carson
Our Sharpeville

I was playing hopscotch on the slate
when miners roared past in lorries,
their arms raised, signals at a crossing,
their chanting foreign and familiar,
like the call and answer of road gangs
across the veld, building hot arteries
from the heart of the Transvaal mine.

I ran to the gate to watch them pass.
And it seemed like a great caravan
moving across the desert to an oasis
I remembered from my Sunday School book:
olive trees, a deep jade pool,
men resting in clusters after a long journey,
the danger of the mission still around them
and night falling, its silver stars just like the ones
you got for remembering your Bible texts.

Then my grandmother called from behind the front door,
her voice a stiff broom over the steps:
‘Come inside; they do things to little girls.’

For it was noon, and there was no jade pool.
Instead, a pool of blood that already had a living name
and grew like a shadow as the day lengthened.
The dead, buried in voices that reached even my gate,
the chanting men on the ambushed trucks,
these were not heroes in my town,
but maulers of children,
doing things that had to remain nameless.
And our Sharpeville was this fearful thing
that might tempt us across the wellswep streets.

If I had turned I would have seen
brocade curtains drawn tightly across sheer net ones,
known there were eyes behind both,
heard the dogs pacing in the locked yard next door.
But, walking backwards, all I felt was shame,
at being a girl, at having been found at the gate,
at having heard my grandmother lie
and at my fear her lie might be true.
Walking backwards, called back,
I returned to the closed rooms, home.

Ingrid de Kok
Exposure

Clashes, Collisions

Collection B
Catrin

I can remember you, child,
As I stood in a hot, white
Room at the window watching
The people and cars taking

5 Turn at the traffic lights.
I can remember you, our first
Fierce confrontation, the tight
Red rope of love which we both
Fought over. It was a square

10 Environmental blank, disinfected
Of paintings or toys. I wrote
All over the walls with my
Words, coloured the clean squares
With the wild, tender circles

15 Of our struggle to become
Separate. We want, we shouted,
To be two, to be ourselves.

Neither won nor lost the struggle
In the glass tank clouded with feelings

20 Which changed us both. Still I am fighting
You off, as you stand there
With your straight, strong, long
Brown hair and your rosy,
Defiant glare, bringing up

25 From the heart’s pool that old rope,
Tightening about my life,
Trailing love and conflict,
As you ask may you skate
In the dark, for one more hour.

Gillian Clarke
Your Dad Did What?

Where they have been, if they have been away,
or what they've done at home, if they have not –
you make them write about the holiday.
One writes *My Dad did.* What? Your Dad did what?

That's not a sentence. Never mind the bell.
We stay behind until the work is done.
You count their words (you who can count and spell):
all the assignments are complete bar one

and though this boy seems bright, that one is his.

He says he's finished, doesn't want to add
anything, hands it in just as it is.
No change. *My Dad did.* What? What did his Dad?

You find the 'E' you gave him as you sort
through reams of what this girl did, what that lad did,
and read the line again, just one 'e' short:
*This holiday was horrible. My Dad did.*

*Sophie Hannah*
The Class Game

How can you tell what class I’m from?
I can talk posh like some
With an ‘Olly in me mouth
Down me nose, wear an ‘at not a scarf
5 With me second-hand clothes.
So why do you always wince when you hear
Me say ‘Tara’ to me ‘Ma’ instead of ‘Bye Mummy dear’?
How can you tell what class I’m from?
‘Cos we live in a coppy, not like some
10 In a pretty little semi, out Wirral way
And commute into Liverpool by train each day?
Or did I drop my unemployment card
Sitting on your patio (We have a yard)?
How can you tell what class I’m from?
15 Have I a label on me head, and another on me bum?
Or is it because my hands are stained with toil?
Instead of soft lily-white with perfume and oil?
Don’t I crook me little finger when I drink me tea
Say toilet instead of bog when I want to pee?
20 Why do you care what class I’m from?
Does it stick in your gullet like a sour plum?
Well, mate! A cleaner is me mother
A docker is me brother
Bread pudding is wet nelly
25 And me stomach is me belly
And I’m proud of the class that I come from.

Mary Casey
Cousin Kate

I was a cottage-maiden
Hardened by sun and air,
Contented with my cottage-mates,
Not mindful I was fair.

5 Why did a great lord find me out
And praise my flaxen hair?
Why did a great lord find me out
To fill my heart with care?

He lured me to his palace-home –
Woe’s me for joy thereof –
To lead a shameless shameful life,
His plaything and his love.
He wore me like a golden knot,
He changed me like a glove:

15 So now I moan an unclean thing
Who might have been a dove.

O Lady Kate, my Cousin Kate,
You grow more fair than I:
He saw you at your father’s gate,
Chose you and cast me by.
He watched your steps along the lane,
Your sport among the rye:
He lifted you from mean estate
To sit with him on high.

25 Because you were so good and pure
He bound you with his ring:
The neighbours call you good and pure,
Call me an outcast thing.
Even so I sit and howl in dust
You sit in gold and sing:

30 Now which of us has tenderer heart?
You had the stronger wing.

O Cousin Kate, my love was true,
Your love was writ in sand:

35 If he had fooled not me but you,
If you stood where I stand,
He had not won me with his love
Nor bought me with his land:
I would have spit into his face
And not have taken his hand.

Yet I’ve a gift you have not got
And seem not like to get:
For all your clothes and wedding-ring
I’ve little doubt you fret.

45 My fair-haired son, my shame, my pride,
Cling closer, closer yet:
Your sire would give broad lands for one
To wear his coronet.

Christina Rossetti
Hitcher

I'd been tired, under
the weather, but the ansaphone kept screaming:
*One more sick-note, mister, and you're finished. Fired.*
I thumbed a lift to where the car was parked.

5 A Vauxhall Astra. It was hired.

I picked him up in Leeds.
He was following the sun to west from east
with just a toothbrush and the good earth for a bed. The truth,
he said, was blowin' in the wind,
or round the next bend.

I let him have it
on the top road out of Harrogate – once
with the head, then six times with the Krooklok
in the face – and didn’t even swerve.

10 I dropped it into third

and leant across
to let him out, and saw him in the mirror
bouncing off the kerb, then disappearing down the verge.
We were the same age, give or take a week.

15 He’d said he liked the breeze
to run its fingers
through his hair. It was twelve noon.
The outlook for the day was moderate to fair.
Stitch that, I remember thinking,

20 you can walk from there.

*Simon Armitage*
The Drum

I hate that drum’s discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To thoughtless youth it pleasure yields,
And lures from cities and from fields,
To sell their liberty for charms
Of tawdry lace, and glittering arms;
And when Ambition’s voice commands,
To march, and fight, and fall, in foreign lands.

I hate that drum’s discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To me it talks of ravaged plains,
And burning towns, and ruined swains,
And mangled limbs, and dying groans,
And widows’ tears, and orphans’ moans;
And all that Misery’s hand bestows,
To fill the catalogue of human woes.

John Scott
Whom is that I see?

And their eyes are grouping

And their eyes are grouping

Brutal foes are haying on the floor

O'the gate where their misty mantle

But I must be leaving

No. I'm not going to lose you; dear

Where are you going? Stay with me, dear

And now they are running

They have passed the farmland already; dear

It must be the farmers so cunning so cunning

O It must be the farmers who drive so near

O What is that sound

O What is that sound
Conscientious Objector

I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death.

I hear him leading his horse out of the stall; I hear the clatter on the barn-floor.

He is in haste; he has business in Cuba, business in the Balkans, many calls to make this morning.

But I will not hold the bridle while he cinches the girth.

And he may mount by himself; I will not give him a leg up.

Though he flick my shoulders with his whip, I will not tell him which way the fox ran.

With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him where the black boy hides in the swamp.

I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death; I am not on his pay-roll.

I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends nor of my enemies either.

Though he promises me much, I will not map him the route to any man's door.

Edna St. Vincent Millay
August 6, 1945

In the Enola Gay
five minutes before impact
he whistles a dry tune

Later he will say
that the whole blooming sky
went up like an apricot ice.
Later he will laugh and tremble
at such a surrender, for the eye
of his belly saw Marilyn’s skirts
fly over her head for ever

On the river bank,
bees drizzle over
hot white rhododendrons

Later she will walk
the dust, a scarlet girl
with her whole stripped skin
at her heel, stuck like an old
shoe sole or mermaid’s tail

Later she will lie down
in the flecked black ash
where the people are become
as lizards or salamanders
and, blinded, she will complain:
Mother you are late, so late

Later in dreams he will look
down shrieking and see

ladybirds
ladybirds

Alison Fell
Invasion

Soon they will come. First we will hear
the sound of their boots approaching at dawn
then they'll appear through the mist.

In their death-bringing uniforms
they will march towards our homes
their guns and tanks pointing forward.

They will be confronted by young men
with rusty guns and boiling blood.
These are our young men
who took their short-lived freedom for granted.

We will lose this war, and blood
will cover our roads, mix with our
drinking water, it will creep into our dreams.

Keep your head down and stay in doors –
we've lost this war before it has begun.

Choman Hardi