

To my nine-year-old self

You must forgive me. Don't look so surprised,
perplexed, and eager to be gone,
balancing on your hands or on the tightrope.
You would rather run than walk, rather climb than run
5 rather leap from a height than anything.

I have spoiled this body we once shared.
Look at the scars, and watch the way I move,
careful of a bad back or a bruised foot.
Do you remember how, three minutes after waking
10 we'd jump straight out of the ground floor window
into the summer morning?

That dream we had, no doubt it's as fresh in your mind
as the white paper to write it on.
We made a start, but something else came up –
15 a baby vole, or a bag of sherbet lemons¹ –
and besides, that summer of ambition
created an ice-lolly² factory, a wasp trap
and a den by the cesspit.

I'd like to say that we could be friends
20 but the truth is we have nothing in common
beyond a few shared years. I won't keep you then.
Time to pick rosehips for tuppence a pound,
time to hide down scared lanes
from men in cars after girl-children,
25 or to lunge out over the water
on a rope that swings from that tree
long buried in housing –
but no, I shan't cloud your morning. God knows
I have fears enough for us both –
30 I leave you in an ecstasy of concentration
slowly peeling a ripe scab from your knee
to taste it on your tongue.

Helen Dunmore, *Glad of These Times* (Bloodaxe Books, 2007) by permission of the publisher.
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¹ sherbet lemons: lemon drops

² ice-lolly: popsicle

How is imagery of childhood used to develop the mood in this poem?
