

Belfast Flight - 1979

Once the wheels tucked in the stranger smiled,
 A small case on his lap – red morocco leather,
 Size of a good book. We talked about the weather,
 Then why we both were heading out to Ireland.

He was a surgeon, neonates, who specialised
 In babies' hearts. Those tiny intense scraps
 Of barely breathing us, mankind, were all his care.
 He opened up the case 'I have invented instruments.'

He said. 'There are no others like them anywhere.'
 And lying there slotted in silk, minute, precise:
 The tiniest of scissors, scalpels, forceps, clamps,
 A Lilliputian craftsman's tools, long-handled, finest steel.

'I carry them with me always. A tiny hole is all I need
 To mend the broken hearts.' Alone in all the world
 This man: in all the world this one small case
 Of love, these straw-thin, silver wands of healing.

'I make them in my shed.' he told me with a smile.
 The plane canted to turn, wings dipped; across the miles
 Of streets we saw the towers, the armoured cars,
 Bombed streets, barbed wire, the city's beating heart.

Mike Harding

Mike Harding's new book of poems will be published by Luath Press, Edinburgh, in 2017.