

# LONG DISTANCE

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Though my mother was already two years dead  
Dad kept her slippers warming by the gas,  
put hot water bottles her side of the bed  
and still went to renew her transport pass.

You couldn't just drop in. You had to phone.  
He'd put you off an hour to give him time  
to clear away her things and look alone  
as though his still raw love were such a crime.

He couldn't risk my blight of disbelief  
though sure that very soon he'd hear her key  
scrape in the rusted lock and end his grief.  
He knew she'd just popped out to get the tea.

I believe life ends with death, and that is all.  
You haven't both gone shopping; just the same,  
in my new black leather phone book there's your name  
and the disconnected number I still call.

TONY HARRISON