

## Your Own Brother

*And Jesus saw Nathanael and he said, "Here is a real Israelite, there is nothing false in him!" — John 1:47*

Light nor air is allowed  
in this room with its windows papered shut.  
Nathanael, brother. Twenty-one when blood  
permeates his eyes, his pupils dilating  
5 to become solitary satellites.

Seven days of waiting and he mumbles  
faintly from a cistern of memory trailers—asks,  
"What have they done to me?" in the drawn-out sigh  
of a tire losing air, morphine like a cold snake  
10 through the swollen parts of his brain.  
He does not mean the doctors  
who ask the impossible questions of his name and the date  
or the loud nurses who keep him dull with needles. No,  
when he says *they*, he means the pack of youths  
15 whose locked limbs made a ring of flesh  
he could not escape, their mouths swearing death.  
He is referring to the invisible boy  
emerging from the impure dark  
to deal him six blows to the skull with a bat  
20 before he fell hard against his own driveway  
bleeding from his ears, mind ringing.

Go ahead, bend down to stroke the heavy wool of dark curls,  
press your lips to the sweating brow that smells of maple syrup.  
You can do nothing. Hold him  
25 when the bathroom mirror shows him  
what they have done to his face  
and later when you see what is done to his soul.  
His anger is not with you, his only sibling.  
It's because he can no longer hear. Is lost.  
30 Feel him push you away,  
not because you leave, close the door like a verdict  
and are free, but because he is captive  
and when he closes his stinging eyes  
against your unfamiliar face,  
35 the only place he goes, is in.

**"Your Own Brother" by Joelene Heathcote**

1. What has happened to the speaker's brother?	
2. What is the purpose of the biblical excerpt at the start of the poem?	
3. Explain the significance of the title.	
4. Find examples of the following poetic devices: a. alliteration  b. simile (there are 2)  c. personification  d. metaphor (there are 4)	
5. What have the "seven days of waiting" been for? Provide specific evidence from the poem to support your answer.	
6. Why would the poet choose to include the following details:  a. "this room with its windows papered shut" (12)  b. "impure dark" (18)  c. "his own driveway" (20)	
7. Why is Nathaniel angry, as explained in the final stanza?	
8. What reason is given in the final stanza for the speaker being pushed away by her brother?	
9. Explain the meaning of the final line: "the only place he goes, is in?" (35)	