

JINNY

Jinny has steel-gray eyes
Is four feet ten and eighty five

There are red-berried hollies by her gate
A gas lamp standard
And a park bench on the lawn
Beside the kitchen garden
The overladen greengage trees
Have props beneath their branches
With enough fruit to fill
Jars by the score for winter storage
And children's greedy mouths as well

Over helter-skelter tumble
Over the brass-plate door sill
Into the living room
Is checked
By Jinny's
I hear you
And I don't mind
But stop that anyway
Glance
She thinks she looks quite stern
But we see through
We are her children's
Children's
Children
And are three times welcome
Sharing as we do
The curly hair
Bequested
By her Irish tinker forebears
Though I can imagine
No child's worst nightmare's dragon
That could face her
Without getting its scales scorched
And its tail lashed
By her tongue

To me
She and this house are one
With its pictures
Victoria – The Queen /
Great grandfather on horse
Brown-uniformed
And sabre drawn /
The tiger
With a cub held by its neck-scruff
And four more beside
Being cuffed on by her paws
Escaping from the hunt
With sahib-bearing palanquins
On elephants
And beaters out in front

But like the tiger
Jinny and the house
Have gone to ground
She lies with her husband
And his parents
In Farnham Churchyard
While they have smashed the house
Back into flint cobbles
And pushed the rubble
Into its cellar
To make way for a road that they
Have now
Decided not to build

But to me
She and this house are one
And Jinny has steel-gray eyes
Is four feet ten and eighty five