

## HORSE CHESTNUT TREE

Wounded by the autumn storms, with tattered limbs it still stands tall,  
Its massive grey-green trunk, which branches forth in three main boughs  
That send out lesser branches, sprouting forth again  
In dainty, curving, swaying twigs.  
It's stood, a sentinel, at our gates all winter long.  
Just after Christmas snow nestled on the barren branches,  
Decorated, oh so delicately, every twig and valley,  
Transformed the drab grey-brown to samite purity.  
Now the old familiar garb is back, the black twigs swell already,  
Water drips despondently from dullish wood onto the sodden lawn.

But what a transformation there will be  
When each black bud breaks open to release the new green leaves,  
Emerging damp and creased like butterflies escaping from a chrysalis.  
The leaves will grow about the flower buds  
And, coaxed by warm spring sun the tiny blooms will open up at last  
Their spikes of cream, flushed pink, set off by emerald leaves.  
Against the azure sky the tossing flowers will reach to catch  
The flying clouds the April breeze blows by.  
And when those petals lie, confetti-like upon the new-mown lawn  
The leaves will yet remain to stay all summer long,  
Filling our rooms with greenness – restful, cool.  
Shielding us from blazing heat our beautiful, beneficent giant.

All through the parching days it takes all trace of moisture  
And beneath its bole the grass is brown, the clay cracks open  
While our giant steals all water for itself.  
Meanwhile small conkers form within leaf clusters and by late summer shower down.  
Inside the fruits are small and white, but constantly they grow,  
And when the autumn storms begin again  
They'll scatter as the gales tear at the tree and toss it to and fro.  
They'll lie in heaps – fruits we cannot eat, or use except as playthings.  
Boys stop their bikes, dismount, stuff out their pockets with the spiky nuts.  
We're glad to see them take a few away; handfuls less for us to rake!  
Barrowsful of shining conkers and discarded husks are dumped,  
But ever more fall to the ground.

Autumn wears on, and the leaves are yellow, hanging limply waiting for the end.  
One sharp hard frost and they will drop – a constant shower  
Of huge brown snowflakes falling quietly to earth,  
Until by nightfall just a few tenacious hangers-on defy the stirring wind.  
Then once more the giant, stark and bare, will hold its own  
Against the winter's storms, and wait .....  
Till, at the first faint signal of the coming spring  
The magic and the mystery start again.