

TIGER-RENGA

1. Little old lady
hobbling the street: on her arm
a very large cat.
2. It's only two hundred yards
from home, but round a corner.
3. He stalks his new bowl.
Cat-food's suspiciously still.
He extends a claw.
4. Every morning the boy
brushes hairs off his pillow.
5. Just some feathers, like
exclamation marks. The cat
does not blink at you.
6. There are elderberries here
black as sin, as tiger's bile.
7. All the spectators
agree: these heaving fighters
are nobody's cats...
8. Guns blast, and a lady faints
up there on the elephant.

9. Moonlit winter night.
He sits outside on the snow,
perfectly at home.
10. Even the fleas are quiet,
forced into hibernation.
11. Bang! A cat hits
a car. On the shed roof, looking
apologetic.
12. That brindled shadow under
the hebe really is him.
13. Curled up on the back
of a sofa. His eyes and brow
are screwed into sleep.
14. Carrying him downstairs. What
does he see in the mirror?
15. Open the curtains
and he's already there, like
the moon, looking in!
16. Unpack the gelid chicken
and there's a scratch at the door.
17. Thunder and lightning.
Dunted books up the bookcase
lead to his shelter.

18. Over, he sails past my desk,
flicking his tail in the air.
19. Fixed to the roof's tip,
he thinks: 'What on earth are you
doing down there?'
20. The kitten fights...the cat biffs
him with one paw, sitting still.
21. A soft wet kiss
and kind of awn against my hand
dangling from the bed.
22. Play these bald flutes by his ears...
He drifts into utter peace.
23. Now he sits for hours
on the garden seat, his ears
a-twitch. 'Birdwatching.'
24. When the stars throw down their spears,
he darkly prowls his borders.
25. Stroke stroke. Purr purr. Then
the ultimate compliment:
he turns round and moons.
26. Hunched all day beneath a tree,
contemplating the hard earth.

27. Shrunken-flanked, cornered, he
wearily turns and sees off
the young labrador.
28. He looks at you from upstairs,
quite blind. You wave at him hard.
29. Paddling his front paws,
blissfully the cat swims for
the first time, and dies.
30. Three growls roll through his body
and snarling teeth: pure tiger.
31. A creak on the stair,
a flicker before my desk...
but no, it's not him.
32. On the lawn a woodpecker
forages close to the house.
33. Absentmindedly,
she strokes the new grass over
the cat's sleeping form.
34. As we came down the garden
he'd shoot past and up a tree.
35. Suddenly, a brindled
shadow there, under the bush...
But no, it's not him.

36. White yarrow nods in the heat,
 flowers shift, a grass-blade flicks.

[2004]

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