

Lady
Nearly Finished

THAT wizened old dear who is shaped like a C,
As she sits in the chair with her head on her knee,
And her matted hair hanging down over the plate
That a hand like a claw simply cannot hold straight. . .

That wizened old dear who is painfully thin,
With a trickle of dribble defacing her chin:
You'll find that she has a peculiar smell
Of biscuits and mothballs and urine as well.

She sits in a chair that has very large wheels,
And nobody knows, if she thinks, what she feels.
She's not said a word now for nearly two years,
And she's here in a home with a dozen old dears.

That wizened old dear is Miss Joan Hunter Dunn,
Amazon sportswoman second to none,
Who went into business and forcefully filled
The chair of the regional Townswomen's Guild.

This powerful woman would get her own way
In the tennis club, yacht club and Guides, so they say.
But now, since her stroke, she is checked every hour
By a bright little person called Sharon Glendower.

Every so often, relations look in,
Quietly whispering, wiping her chin.
Not that she knows, as she's shaped like a C,
And her matted hair hangs in precarious tea.

* This was written when I thought that the redoubtable Joan Hunter Dunn was a figment of poet John Betjeman's imagination. Then, on reading a report of her death in 2009, I discovered that she had actually existed. I had written the poem to record what the passage of time is apt to do and because I so enjoyed the rhythm of the original verses – certainly not with a view to belittling a clearly heroic lady – JS.