

## **A Child Destroyed**

**Elizabeth Jennings**

I can do nothing but feel, I can imagine  
The terror within the mind of that child who was carried  
Away from a moment of play. What did she see  
In her mind's eye? Was it a happy regret?  
Crumpets and milk? The TV children's programme?  
He held the stinking cloth against her mouth  
And she must have smelt tobacco, dirt, male stench.  
She tried to scream. She kicked him and he gripped  
Her legs together, pinioned arms behind her.  
Again and again I turn to my own childhood  
When fears were but imaginary ones,  
My only pains concussion or pneumonia,  
And they seem honours as I try to force  
Myself into this small child's little shoes  
And clean white socks, and soft washed hair, and then  
I bring her start in life to bear on me.  
She knew of love in night-time kisses, hugs  
And kind hands holding hers. Now this large weight,  
The man's cruel body forcing her to lie  
Under his. I hear her small frock torn.  
I hope by then she was unconscious but  
She may have felt the thrust and heave of sex,  
Smelt the man's breath, and then he gripped her neck  
And twisted it as if it were a bird's  
Or else a rabbit's. So our world behaves.  
We have grown lax and comfort-loving, watched  
The act of sex on big screens in the dark,  
Have eaten, drunk too much. We are to blame  
And this small, broken, violated child  
Must be the scapegoat. I'm ashamed and hate  
The helplessness I feel, my world's cruel work.