

Blanche Rose

Our grandmother Blanche Rose
they said, married beneath her
but Gran sitting proud and straight-backed
in her wicker wheelchair, held court
clutching rolled-up handkerchieves
to keep her rheumy hands from closing
and dominated the wartime army hut
on a little piece of land
that Granddad saved up to buy
his elegant bride when ankles were not seen
and breasts were bound and flattened.
She sat by the range be-shawled and queenly
where Granddad in a fug of smoke and smell
cooked his kippers on a toasting fork
reverting in old age to his rustic ways
and Gran lavishly rubbed in wintergreen
and wearing her lisle stockings against the draughts
made the daily orders from her chair,
a bag of apples, a large cabbage and three or four large leeks
from her farming sons who, boot-shod and earthy-smelling
called to visit her.
or, You Boy, clear the nettles under the window
if you were silly enough to get in her line of vision
which mostly we didn't, though it might have earned us
a sixpence.
But we loved her and our chat and laughter
was only outdone by the random
and raucous notes of the cuckoo clock
and royal Gran enjoyed it all
as far as her hearing would allow,
as the night enveloped her heathland realm,
and all the lamps were lit.