

Upstairs

“Gran? Come on Gran.” And heavy eyelids lift over rheumy eyes. They focus on the ten year old with a questioning gaze and a raised spoon of steaming broth. Gran’s hand plucked at the fabric on the chair that was hers, night and day.

Where she sat at the fireplace the heat was fierce and gave her face a rosy hue. Her back was always protected from draughts by an old blanket.

Gran’s eyes looked to the staircase. “When I was a babby I used to crawl up them stairs When I was 10 like you I ran up em. When I was 16 your grandad tried to carry me up em! What a laff! Then I got old, and I crawled up em again.”

“And now you don’t go up em at all, Gran.”

“No love.”

It was quiet then, just Gran supping noisily; her gaze was on the stairs, her thoughts on the past.

Up to the loom.

The highest room

The noisy room

The dusty room

The prison room.

The money room.

But oh, it was The Room with a View.

Gran remembered the stolen glimpses of people scurrying down below when she was supposed to be working. The horses and carts. The buildings. The seasons changing. She would imagine where the people were going. The rich, the poor, all passed along below her. She was Queen of all she surveyed for that moment – she held in her mind the pictures of the people below just as hard as her hands held the broom, the scissors, the cloth. This was her life, the dreams created alongside the dust.

At this great age, she was free of the noise, the dust, the long hours of backbreaking work. But the stairs deny her, her Room with a View.