

Grannies 1942

The girls at school spoke of their grannies
That was the word they used except for Joan
She called her Gran Grandmama Violet
and Pam's Gran had to be addressed as Darling Grandmother Pearl

This calling and naming of grannies entranced me
I called my Gran, Gramma Hal. A name which, in my mind, bore close connections to
Henry 8. The girls at school laughed and questioned her entitlement.
Just as I questioned the Darling part of Pam's Gran Pearl.
Twas obvious to me that Pearl's demand sprung also from entitlement
Of pedigree. Blue blood.
Definitely not from shown affection. Poor Pam pretended.
Couched her voice and tone to meet demands
Allowed her skin to lie when touched
Her muscles to adopt facades and turn their fire off
Remain flaccid.

The girls told stories of their grannies' houses. Manicured gardens, antique furniture,
velvet curtains, grandfather clocks. Their grannies' lives, also manicured, were dotted
with garden parties, hospital visits, Women's Guild and Church.
The girls told stories of their grannies vestments. A lace cap here, a warm shawl there,
black morning dress pinched at the waist, grey satin skirt for evenings. I didn't tell them
Gramma Hal wore trousers quaffed beer in pubs, straight whiskey in the kitchen where
she cooked for ten or more, cigarillo dangling from her lips. Strode cross the Downs with
walking stick, a Trilby on her head, set at a rakish angle. Challenged me at every turn. I
hugged her bony frame and knew its strength with love.

When she had died at 85 I heard her story, told by a daughter. Told in many ways from
angles misaligned. As a young woman, Gramma Hal showed expertise as Chatelaine of

Mayfair Club familiar with the ways of food but not of men succumbed to charm and waxed moustache. Disowned by family, wealth and Church, she chose another faith and, true to pattern of converted, adopted ritual fervently. Placated crippled husband, (infected womanizer), supported him, five children in Depression - and a shop –used clothing- a success.

Had I known my Gramma’s story would I have told? Told of her chipped nails? Of floors that bruised her knees? Of the four levels she climbed thrice daily arms loaded? Of her sewing steaming pressing to disguise the old as new?
My Gramma Hal entitled is-to dignity and privacy.
Would she have told her story thus?.



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