

Comeuppance

By Paul Batchelor

I liked the way she said it,
like getting a fleck
of baccy off her lip:
You'll get your comeuppance.
It had a smack – more
than a smack – of inheritance,
the way she'd spit
those plosives out –
think *spite*, think *pittance*,
think *precious little* –
as I ducked outside
to pick a dandelion:
You'll get your comeuppance.
I took her word for it.

Her fear of dandelions!
We'd plant them in her slippers
or the cutlery drawer – ridiculous,
the way the littlest thing
betokened something –
her toothache, her bunions,
her illiterate faith in language –
the way an idle word,
a bitten-off breath,
could seed the day with auguries;
the way if you said *pig*
she wouldn't leave the house
but sit, fixed in her chair,
the way she sits today,

cast up on widowhood
like something brittle
while her daughters fuss about her.
Tight-lipped, she'll never speak
about their father. She'll die
asking if it's fair,
her fine-spun puff of hair –
flustered, pitiful,
backlit by the nightlight,
in the end
neither here nor there –
like a blown clock, or,
yes, *Pittle-the-bed*,
as she might have said.