

His Collarbone

Ioana Petrescu¹
University of South Australia

I haven't thought much about the family grave
but I have often wondered how that peony flower
broke through cement. I can see now,
it's firmly anchored to the sides, beneath the headstone.
My mother's coffin just fits underneath.
The priest pours oil on it, I don't know why,
I haven't been to church in years.

There are two bags on the side of the grave.
These are your grandmother's bones, he says,
and these are your father's.
First time I see my father after twenty years,
a bag of bones. I shouldn't faint, it's him, and yet,
all I can see poking through the bag
is this delicately curved white collarbone.
I wonder how he could carry me when I was little,
on his back, if his white bones were all that delicate.
He should've drunk more milk, I think,
the priest pours oil over the bones,
I don't know why and what it means,
I haven't been to church in years.

Priests and doctors.
The first poke at your soul, my father used to say,
the second at your body. So he smoked some more,
brown nicotine designs mapping the hands
he waved reciting verses from Baudelaire.
They know nothing, he used to say,
coffee puts blood pressure up, and vodka puts it down,
and if one drinks both at a time

¹ Dr. Ioana Petrescu is a Romanian-born Adelaide poet and academic who, since she came to Australia in 1996, has published two collections of poetry and over a hundred poems in Australian journals and overseas, has edited six books, produced a poetry CD, supervised numerous creative writing projects at the University of South Australia, and is Director of UniSA's Poetry and Poetics Centre. Her third poetry collection, *Persuading Plato*, is currently under print with Ginninderra Press.

the perfect balance is achieved, he used to say,
and drank more coffee, balanced out with vodka.

My mother's coffin's lacquered and has leaves carved in the wood,
she used to love flowers and leaves.

The priest lowers the bags of bones back in the grave:

one is my grandmother, the other is my father.

Now they are both together at my mother's feet.

The priest pours oil, I don't know why,

I haven't been to church in a while,

and I can still see my father's collarbone.

Luck

Ioana Pretrescu

Kneel in front of this fountain –
the angels carved it with their wings, poured water
to quench your thirst with holy luminous drops
in which you can see your reflection –
pear-shaped, heart-shaped, tear-shaped – until it bursts.
You throw in a coin for luck. It says on the sign
that if you give a coin to the waters your life will flow
smoothly, love will bless your heart, you'll see ideas
with your pineal eye – but why would life flow, you ask,
if its model is a carved fountain surrounded by a pool
of stagnant water?
And the question falls flat on the pavement
and is picked up by a pigeon
who thinks you're just another tourist
who feeds it crumbs.

Editing

Ioana Pretrescu

That poem was made of grit and mud,
it was grubby in its unformed syllables,
earthy in its unmouthed words.

Its blistered language was infected
by long-festering thoughts, its lines
wrapped around like stuck rotting bandages.

I ripped the crust from the poem's wounds
and recited it loudly, rolling it on my tongue.

I licked the poem clean verse by verse, then watched it heal,
its form now clear and pure for others to judge.