

My Mother's Dress

Vicky Tsaconas

The day after the eighteenth anniversary of my father's death, my mother empties the *μπαουλο* that she brought with her on the ship from Greece fifty-eight years ago.

Its contents for the last thirty years: fifteen packets of blankets. Opened once only - to put moth balls in them. She gives me her and my father's *στεφανα* for safe-keeping while her house is being renovated and its contents put into storage. She also gives me a fuchsia chiffon dress. The one she wants to be buried in. I cannot remember her ever wearing it, not even in the seventies, when she and my father went to social gatherings (dinner dances, christenings, weddings).

I imagine her in this garish, floaty dress in a coffin. She is much thinner, shorter, now — from severe osteoporosis and years of not cooking for herself. I wish she would choose something warmer, more like her (serious). I wonder if she will want her strappy cream sandals too, the ones she used to wear on special occasions. The dainty ones with kitten heels she bought before her varicose veins started to bulge.

I have no memory of what my mother was wearing the day my father died. But as soon as we returned home from the hospital, she changed into black. That is all she has worn since. That, and dark blue and, in more recent years, brown.

My father was buried in the same blue pin-stripe suit in which he was married. He did not choose his final piece of clothing. He died suddenly and my mother made the choice. At the time, I wrapped one of my earrings and a coin in a white handkerchief and put them into his pocket before his clothes were collected by the funeral parlour people.

My mother's dress does not have pockets.

μπαουλο — trunk; also, glory box

στεφανα — wedding 'crowns' worn during a Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony. Traditionally, the crowns, attached by a ribbon, are buried with the last of the couple to die.