

KELLY DUMAR

Singing Over Your Bones

I know where you live now, grandmother – I know. Your ash bones blow on this wind that rises out of silence like my song for you: Flora, lover of wildflowers, speechless one, mute about crimes in your own home. Without murmur or complaint, lonely and old, you were sent to the afterlife by way of a funeral which many attended, except your two daughters who boycotted, and two sons who fled mid-stream when seized by stomach cramps, and a last son, little piggy, who skipped to stay home.

I had never – not in public - lifted my voice in song when I sang at your funeral. I had not been asked, no one gave me permission. It began as a cough does, clawing the back of my throat when the minister woke us from our dream of what his sermon could be by clearing his throat and invoking a moment of silence, in your memory. And, like a cough, there was no stopping it - cut loose from my throat, cracking the silence to pieces –

Hush little baby, don't say a word, mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird. . . and if that mockingbird won't sing. . . daddy's gonna buy you diamond ring. . .

There was perfect attendance but no singing at grandfather's funeral, years before, which nobody boycotted or got stomach cramps from, and during which all your five children kept their fingers crossed to keep from pointing them. I'll tell you a secret that spilled - some fathers' sins are eternally mesmerizing.

The night you lay dying in your hospital bed, I was tucking my daughters into theirs, singing a lullaby when you called my name, I swear. I kissed them and hurried, hoping to reach you in time. In the ghost-light of that room your spirit, already gone begging, whispered, Help me heal things that I left broken. Since I am a dutiful granddaughter, I do. Because, I won't sacrifice my children's hearts, those delicate seeds, to silence. If any word out of my mouth - my womb - could slice the fingers groping toward their innocence, I would cut, with my word, through steel or strings - I would cut family ties before they bound my children's seed hearts to a lie.

You died in my arms with all your unsaid words, those tramps, floating homeless, around the bed. They hitch hiked a ride on the intake of my breath. They set up camp in my belly. And now, when I sing, I send them home.