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Legacy

by Kay Barnes

Baroque, a designer calls it, late eighteenth,
a “waterfall desk.” Lovely in its way, he says,
as he traces the walnut burls, palms the inlays,
fingers the carvings, the spools,

but out of place in your foyer.
I’ve accepted another piece of mother’s,
though my husband’s had enough
of her good taste, shakes his head

as if antiques she spent vacation days collecting
(silver cradled in flannel and chronicled
like honorable ancestors:
two Regency salt spoons, one Charter Oak gravy ladle,
eight King Richard lemon forks)

are bogus claims to grandeur.
“Something to pass on,” she’d whisper
to my father at the register.
“Something *Baroque!*” Anything Baroque

might magically connect El Reno, Oklahoma,
to Newport, R.I., and the life of Mrs. Riley—
for me. But something hidden in those terraces
of shallow drawers was what *I* wanted:

A letter of passion from anyone to anyone.
A sepia photo of a splendid woman of dubious
character, the aunt I was never told about,
whose smile was my own.

I move it into the guest room with other old pieces,
all of them out of the way. I tell my husband
it has to do with dreams, possibilities,
but I don’t say whose. I tell him what counts

are all those complications, surfaces
aswirl with broken curves,
the turmoil in the grain,
the eyes in the veneer.

