

Marriage Casket

Beneath the steep-gabled roof of my grandparents' cottage, we had a chest filled with stiff greyed blankets & moth balls to keep out the mice. The box

is mine now, plain, not decorated & mostly empty. The painted panels that decorated early marriage caskets, though beautifully done, are strange: the story of Lisabetta da Messina tells of a girl whose beloved was killed by her brothers. She retrieved his head & kept it in a vase. It sprouted with the only sweet her woman's life would have: basil, the tender

green cut into salad & sauce. I hope the vase sat atop her chest; empty vessels all.

Gifts for daughters might be things they would need: linens & layettes, some lingerie. Things we might need later in life. Fancy work, tatting to dress some drudgery. My friend tells me how the last time she went through security,

TSA pulled her aside after the full body scan for an invasive search. Few words between them, but several pairs of hands. She tried to explain her aberrant body: what was missing – the amorphous space visible in black & white. I hope she was calm as she named the emptiness inside her. She doesn't fly anymore.

In the stylized geography of horror, there is a location called The Terrible Place – usually underground, dark & wet. Both the beginning & end of something, associated with the womb. I hope my high-school love knew, when we broke into my grandparents' cottage in winter, made an unwise fire – burning first the decorative birch – that all the things I promised were untrue. That I was an empty vessel, with *something malformed inside*. Not even an herb could sprout from me, not one single sprig of green. Maybe that's why I never had a hope chest,

no box to dress my future wifery. But if I did, I would want the squarest of corners (for leaning & sitting) and the panels painted with *Eros e' Anteros*. Winged love, answered love, neither boxed or embodied or bound.

--C. Kubasta