

The Mangle

By Barbara Rockman

The Mangle

Before disposable paper gowns before laundry service sealed sanitary
 snap or tie front or back as instructed my mother halved twin sheets
 took pinking shears to the center and cut round holes:
 hemmed ghost costumes to drape my father's patients.

Like Corrasable bond eased into a typewriter
 like butcher paper unrolled to wrap the roast
 my mother fed the electronic mangle
 from an iron chair in a corner of the kitchen

leaned into the white enamel behemoth
 heap of damp percale to her left
 rollers' steam hum of cogs smell of near burn
 Sucked dry and crisped a stack of folded squares rose beside her

Rim of perspiration round her hairline
 her dark hair burr and frizz

to mangle: severely mutilate, disfigure, damage by cutting, tearing or crushing
 as, ruin with intonation ex. the speech was *mangled* by poor delivery

My mother accepted one definition:

verb, to wring dry and press flat

She would not call herself a complicated woman

as, a life soured by circumstance

How flat the sheets as they exited the hot press

how they fell in waves how my mother snatched them

before they fell to linoleum stood to snap crease and pile

afternoon sun crossing her bent shoulders small daughter watching

mangle: originally, a device for deceiving

My mother said she found God as she crouched in filthy dungarees, torn Keds, weeding a bed of
 peonies and lupines. Ragged with care: she wanted an illusion of wildness. All her life she
 perfected balance between expectation and independence, would not succumb to grief or
 weakness. At 85, she died
 mouth frozen wide to what she was about to say.

