

THE MANGLE

Barbara Rockman

Barbara Rockman is author of *Sting and Nest* which received the New Mexico-Arizona Book Award and the National Press Women Book Prize. Her new collection, *to cleave*, is forthcoming from University of New Mexico Press. Her poems appear in *Bellingham Review*, *Nimrod*, *Louisville Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *terrain.org*, and many anthologies. She teaches writing at Santa Fe Community College and is Workshop Coordinator for Wingspan Poetry Project bringing poetry to victims of domestic violence. A frequent collaborator with artists, her work has been featured at the Conference on Radical Feminism, Barcelona. Barbara lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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.

