

Sara Henning

The Mandoline

Because girls shouldn't lay
their hands on sharp things,
my grandfather entrusts
the kitchen armoire

to acquit the brutal body.
There it perches with his blush
bone china, albatross
among a horde

of enamel darlings.
I'm not delicate, so I marvel
at its parallel surfaces
of cut-rate plastic

and metal. He never tells me
I'm beautiful, so I'm urging
a plum along
the adjustable

incline, trusting the device
to caress whatever it transforms.
I don't know that
soon, I'll be

watching threads of blood
skirt my thumb until he looks
at me. I don't know
both of us



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standing there in silence will
begin to laugh, and for years
I'll lark my way
through

the absurdity of pain
until I learn laughter is not
a passion but a sign.
Years later,

when he writes in his will
that my mother must witness
his cremation, she'll stare
as white cotton

and cardboard inter
her father. She'll watch him
enter the chamber head first.
Because she's hungry,

or realizes his desire
to be cruel to her, she'll imagine
he's a gingerbread man,
disciple of dough

who, when the timer
expires, will thrust his body
from the oven and run.
Until he's removed,

and cooled, his wreckage
milled with a motorized blade
and returned to her hands,
she'll laugh his life



into a harmless equilibrium.
She'll master her father
the way I never mastered
the thick moons

of plum abandoned
on the mandoline's blade,
my blood aroused
by their play

of representation,
my blood crying *do not save*
love for things. Throw
things to the flood.

