

The Mincers

I found a meat grinder.

Heavy, cast iron and sticky with dust. It lay hidden on the floor of our pantry, under the shelves, thick with layers of dog hair and debris that fell from the dustpan but missed the bin. It sits there next to its sister, almost identical and equally neglected, similar shape and design and ever so slightly different in size and capacity.

Each were my respective grandmothers.

On my mother's side: it weighs heavier and the metal much darker with blackened rust, the stiffened screw for the attached table clamp takes determination to turn yet the crushing mechanism—activated at the turn of the handle—moves fluidly within the central chamber. I visualise stories of her—my mother's mother; her face is clear to me in repetitions of glimmers from multiple photographs and glances of memories and moments of childhood and the permanent image of her open casket is etched into me like a lithograph stone; repeated over and over through the mouth of my mother; where details merge, transform and exaggerate—she manifests a hyperbole, she's starting to forget too.

On my other side: the meat grinder is an illegible heirloom. There is no information, no photograph for me to visualise her through; her using it; her hands nor her face, as she turned out pounds of minced animal and vegetable flesh to feed her family in their Welsh homestead. There is nothing there but the picture in my mind—a fiction: invented stories in place of truths. The title embossed on its side, "General Chopper", always triggered an inaudible giggle as I imagined a military villain who took pleasure in mincing their victims. Her family were once in the business of razor blades. The iron is dull but clear of tarnish, the parts still mobile; well cared for; a practice of good practice; copied into my brain like Command V chromosomes: every knife I use I must sharpen, it will only hurt you more if it's not. I have the chunky scar of a sliced off fingertip to prove it.

"...illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential."
Donna Haraway, A Cyborg Manifesto.

Both analogue machines still operate, still function; in a memory somewhere; sleeping side by side in an unseen space on the coarse tiled floor. I think about the line of inheritance, their journey to my life where mine is a product of theirs. I think of the hands that used them to fulfil the robotic duties of domestic work. Their forms that facilitated the political hegemony of housewife. Both were originally from England, similar company, middle class, educated. Both died shrouded in an absence of knowledge, a deterioration of collective family RAM; these objects hold their very data, their DNA, encrypted in their surfaces; fossilised bodies for flesh.