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Poem

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The butcher's hands--

have collected layer after layer of pale scars,
I trace my finger over smooth, white ridges,
Thin, long lines and small, raised crescents
Wrapping around unfortunate digits.
I hold his hand.

I rub at the calluses of his skin,
Ghosting over where the knife grips and grinds
Against his palm. These hands have learned to make a living
Out of dismemberment. In return, cruel machines have
Bitten back into warm flesh with serrated teeth,
Exposing his inner vitality, runny, glossy, and red.
The unintelligible sight pulls at my insides and yet,
I have tipped clear peroxide over these gashes each time.

I bring his hand to my lips, taste the salt of his labor
On the back of his palm. The smell of blood and viscera
Never really washes out of his skin anymore;
He's done this for too long.
Hands that have torn flesh apart
Have held us with the most tender of touches,
Have grown rough and always been gentle.
With these hands, he feeds his family,
He gives us life.

With trembling tenderness, his damaged hands have
Carved out a place for us to stand in this country.
Vision blurring and throat constricting,
I pick at the hardened meat and blood around and in his nails;
I clean my father's hands.