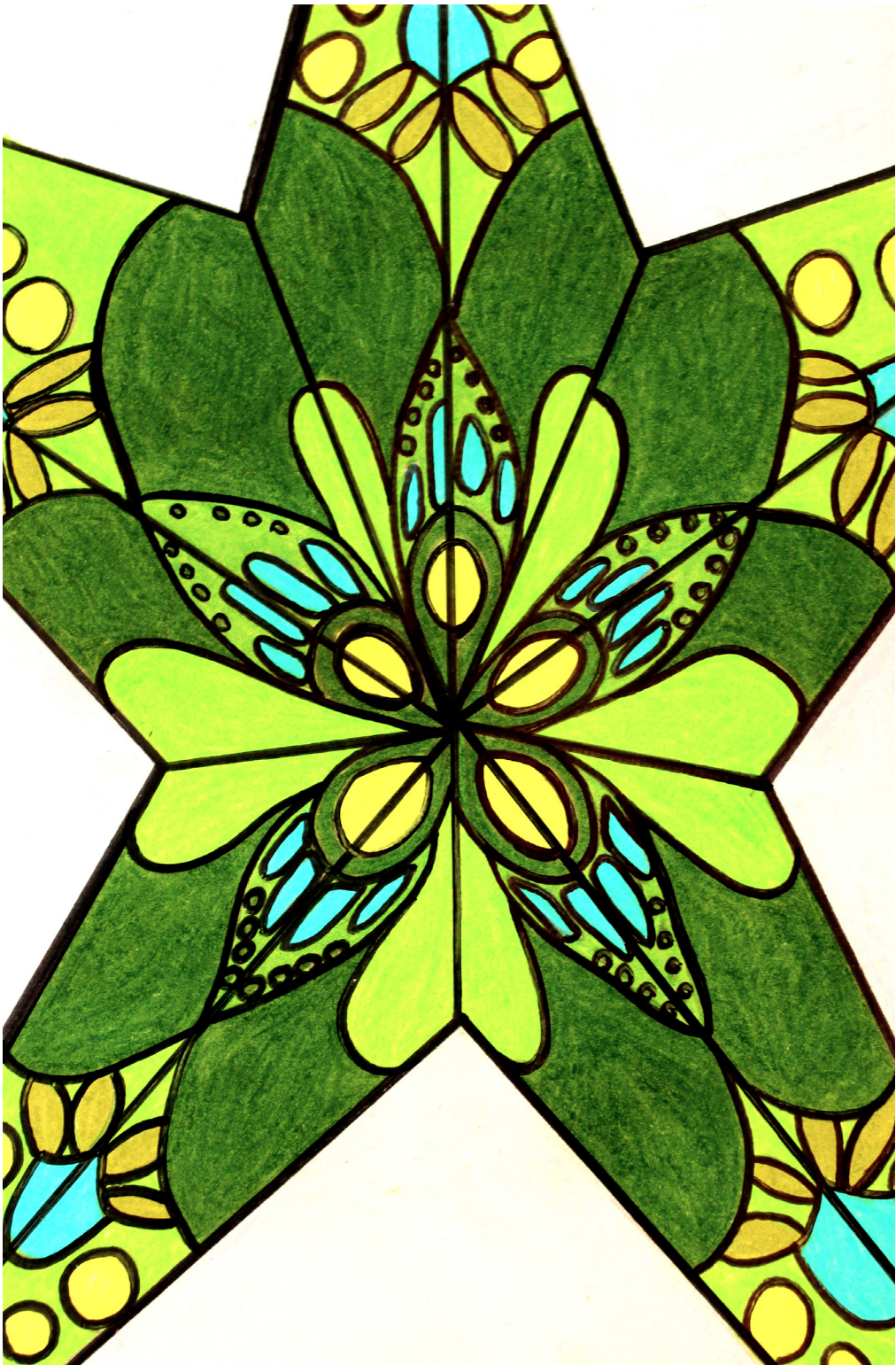


# manuscripts

Spring 2014



Butler University



# MSS

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*Front cover art by Maggie Carey. Back cover art by Kelly Oden.*

## 4 Tricks To Make Her Orgasm- AskMen

Bob Barrick

Her shoulder, white like a page.  
Her sex; her words.

Her words; italic little men  
dancing naked 'round a maypole.

*I've drug myself through the tombs of unnamed princes,  
those child-kings spared of contracting their graves, and,  
through the hole the floor dug in my knee,  
I've taken thousand-year-old dirt into my bloodstream.*

Say I were  
to take my tongue  
to her naval.  
Would her stomach turn to jam?  
I ask the Internet  
*how to give a girl an orgasm.*

I am the aggregate  
knowledge of a millennium's men.

Say I were to compare her  
to another lover.

# Carmelia

## Tommy O'Rourke

Carmelia constantly confused the little hairs on her knuckles for tiny fuses leading to the bottle rocket of her soul. She burnt her fingers bald and even singed some skin into rust blotches with the extra-large matchsticks she used to light her Lucky Strikes. Her fingers were always fiddling with the rosary dangling around her neck, which she constructed in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade using nothing but speaker wire and cigarette butts, both stolen from her father, like her grey-violet eyes. As she danced, her pupils dilated. The booming music. The record player pushed its needle into vinyl to make music out of scratching and spinning. With her bowl cut black hair, she look like an over caffeinated boy when seen through her eleventh story window by the line of sight neighbors in the apartment complex across the parkway. Her window was an outward looking canvas framed by the universe on every side. Her rhythmic figure was framed by a plethora of dulling brick and anonymous city windows, by street-lit sidewalks and Christmas colored traffic lights, by the wealthy northern suburbs and the poverty of the Southside, by the seething center of this planet and the light polluted heavens silently moving through the thick violet night sky, and finally, our Carmelia was framed by the margins of this page.

Every night Carmelia would count the stars. There were no stars. They had been swallowed whole by the myriad of filaments thinning thinning thinning as they hummed themselves away. Carmelia despised fluorescent lighting. She was temporarily suspended from the fifth grade for refusing to remove her sunglasses in Spelling class. Her pupils nearly flooded the entirety of her iris in any light. Those holes always gulped down too much of the world. In bright spaces she would close her eyes and either fall asleep or write out a reality more dimly tinted than this one.



The small studio apartment, which she afforded by buying psychedelics wholesale online and selling it to her faux-friends at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, was lit entirely with Christmas lights year round, the walls and ceiling always covered in primary colors that blended together, coloring the air of her room with a milky glow of light lavender. This light's thick radiation and Carmelia's spasmodic motions to the booming Joy Division record made it look like she was drowning in a water color painting.

Her apartment had the stale smell of cigarettes, marijuana, apple pie, and propane gas, which hissed from her stove subtly at all times, joining the antique coo-coo clock on the kitchen wall in a duet rendition of the immutable music of empty rooms when she was away. They sang to the nothing that filled the apartment whenever Carmelia walked for cigarettes or boarded the 72 bus to pick up the shipments from the anonymously owned post office box, the keys to which lay silently on the loud hardwood floor next to the mattress, in a large wool sock with an unruled journal, green felt tip pen, a Virgin Mary Prayer card with fraying laminate, and a wallet sized photograph of someone she had never met before. She bought it from the Salvation Army on 86<sup>th</sup> street. She couldn't bear to see it lying there, carelessly left to the hopeless enclosure of a small thrift store picture frame, so she placed it in her cart full of books written in languages she couldn't understand and never planned to. Their spines broken and pages coffee stained. Behind the dusted and slightly cracked glass pane was a candid photo of an elderly woman frozen mid-sentence. Her heavy eyes half closed and mouth parted to deliver that type of breathing called speech. Her cheeks, Carmelia thought, were beautiful, broken, and grey like the shattered pavement she flicked her cigarettes onto from her slid open window. From above, she stared down. She imagined those cracks to be rivers that rose from the forgotten dirt deep beneath this concrete city. She would stare down into the miniature fissures until she could envision the city completely decayed, or until she could trace her name in the arbitrary gibberish of the massive, flat, and shattered slab of manmade movable rock. Regarding this digging with vision, Carmelia wrote:

*If liquid keep cement spinning in transit. Pour and muffle crust.mantle. core as a foundation for construction noises that sound like someone quietly speaking, like weeping electronics or gunshots echoing in daylight. Let wet concrete dry when the children finish swimming in it. Mothers tearing gravel from their young flesh.*

The glowing Christmas lights concealed an otherwise vanilla room. Carmelia slept on a mattress with no bed frame in the center of her room. She slept with a silk blanket she had been giving by someone to whom she was too young to say thank you to at the time. She twitched and spoke

frequently in her sleep as if her dreams livened something inside of her that desired to escape her body. When she couldn't sleep, she would reach for the plastic black flashlight she kept beneath her pillow to make shadow puppets on the naked white wall across from the open window, which hung over her head as she sat there in shivering under silk, a cigarette suspended and glowing between her chapped lips, pointing the flashlight with her right hand and making signals to drape shadows with her left. She also wrote poetry by this light.

On the floor beside her record player was a messily stacked pile of newspaper whether forecasts she had gotten in the habit of discretely slipping from the Chicago Sun-Times newsstand each time she wandered to the gas station to purchase her Lucky Strikes. When the sun was too overbearing for Carmelia's light-chugging eyes, she would tape these papers over her blind-less window, making the prophetic text almost hover there on the comparatively transparent and pale paper. The forecast was the only thing she would frequently read other than the Surgeon General Warning on her cigarette packs and her own writing, which she thought was just as toxic and relieving as nicotine.

The paper tabs of acid on her sharp tongue dissolved in the involuntary warmth of salivation as the music pushed her body through the room. The bitter mushrooms that she had chewed and swallowed made her insides feel like a drying machine filled to the brim shattered glass and set on high. She savored the strange taste of them until the point of gagging. It was the unpalatable taste of the natural that reminded her of splashing through mud puddles as a child, when she would wait for the rain to cease before seeking her yellow rubber raincoat. She sensed the artificial comfort, the water resistance, and the yellowness that used to slightly shift the skin tone of her porcelain forearms as she stopped dancing to sit down and pack the white powder DMT into the little glass bong she had named Lolita. DMT is present in almost all things living and when it is released at the moment of psychological death, it spurs the hallucinatory effects of near death experiences. The lighter ignited the bowl into a coal that filled the clear glass with smoke as thick as milk. Carmelia opened her lungs for it and slinked back behind her eyelids before the fog had even finished flowing from her mouth and nostrils.

Carmelia felt her body falling in on itself. She saw with closed eyes an infinity of wet concrete under an overcast sky. Knee deep, she exhaled technicolor hummingbirds into the grey air and bled water from her wrists. She tried to tap the tip of her tongue to the roof of her mouth to make say something, but each attempt yielded a physical, living, and winged utterance. Her propositions would flock and flutter, oscillating in every direction. If she thought without trying to speak, she could sense an

uncomfortable fluttering under her skin, but the hummingbirds had burst through her esophagus with force, swelling her throat. This tenseness in her neck was terrifying, so she withstood the fluttering until all at once, an explosion from every pore. A myriad of flight burst through the skin. The birds were microscopic enough to squeeze through the prison bar pores and swell quickly into their normal forms. At this moment, she suddenly found herself plucked from the wet concrete and gliding through the diverse swarm of songless bright birds. *The positive silence of the universe is perfect music*, Carmelia would have thought, but she was not consciously able to do anything other than absorb this new reality through osmosis. She had been given no means with which to grasp or contort it. Such means would mean leaving this playful coexistence for the consolation prize of understanding. So she fluttered in the cloud of feathers against the contagious grey.

She spat out a mouthful of ash when she awoke. The snow was already six inches thick when Carmelia opened her eyes. It fell from the air just beneath the Christmas lights of her ceiling. It covered every surface of the apartment, even Carmelia, herself, who delicately brushed the snow from her body and rose slowly to her bare feet. The circular white void in the violet sky diffused itself through the cracked window, forcing the frozen accumulation to glisten like diamonds flickering in and out of existence. She hummed into this moonlight and found in her hand a cardinal wrapped in rusted barbed wire. She cut her palms on the jagged spurs and smiled. Little bits of gravel and honey fell from the wounds. She reached for her pen and notebook and wrote something slowly. She slid open her window and climbed to the ledge, still humming to herself aimlessly. The snow still falling. She stepped off the ledge and rose through the pores of the night sky that give way to the hidden infinity of white beneath all things. The note on the desk read:

*Pressed into the cracked patio surface of her family's suburban backyard are two palm prints. Carmelia's hands as a child were massive and ever-reaching, but she grew into them. The impressions in the cement looked like three dimensional cave paintings. The surface began the slow and silent process of shattering that drizzling spring day when she cemented herself into the memory of this inanimate slab. Two decades' passing meant her hands had shattered in place, allowing blades of grass to rise through her palm prints and dance above the swelling snow beneath the flowing smoke of burnt out stars.*



# She's much more than Cool

Earl Townsend

Mussolini's in the parking garage eating Fettuccini Alfredo.  
I'm in a museum eating squirrel from Philadelphia.  
Sometimes I take a shower with nothing else to do.

Certain things don't need proof.  
She's much more than cool.

What crosses the mind of a fox in the middle of the night?  
Tell me where swine goes to die.  
I come from the pages of People Magazine.

My favorite food is brandy.  
My favorite ice cream is candy.  
She's the straps to my backpack.  
She's the arm to my nicotine patch.

Certain things don't need proof.  
She's much more than cool.

I step on the scale it says, "I'm Alive!"  
A courtroom of orangutans ain't no time for monkey business.  
If you can don't be shrewd, have the confidence to be rude.

Certain things don't need proof.  
She's much more than cool.



“Yellow” by Cassidy Olson

## Meditation at the Bell Tower

Wesley Sexton

This is one of those places that is supposed to be important. It is here so you can have a place to go (not so you can do anything there) but just because it is nice to have somewhere to go. More specifically, this place is a place for two people to go together, a place to spend a delightful springtime afternoon, a place to watch the sunset. In short, this is not a spot for the loner, looking for a quiet reprieve (although today I am that loner, and that is what I am doing); this spot is for love.

I mean is it coincidence that the cast-iron fencing is embellished with heart-shaped adornments? Perhaps you could make the argument that these are not hearts, but rather two swans touching heads. But even if that is the case, is the swan image any less romantic than the heart one? And what about the configuration? This spot is in a valley, displaced from the road, and as I look out over the pond, a fountain attempts to silence the chatter of the outside world. This place wants me to feel far away from others, far away from work and worry and the notion of “progress,” and closer to the one that I love.

Consider the fact that the benches here cozily seat two people (no more, no less). In fact, the other half of my bench appears mockingly lonely to me.

And perhaps the most meaningful symbol here, the object that truly captures the spirit of this place: the bell tower. Looking across the pond I am confronted with this massive thing, which now marks the passing of an hour as if it were something to celebrate (and maybe it is). As the history goes and as the plaque reading “In memory of Mrs. Holcomb” suggests, Mr. James Irving Holcomb erected this bell tower to show his wife that he still loved her. The Holcomb’s were married one year for each step leading up to the bell tower (52 in all) and this monument is trying to tell me that forever is possible. This whole place

is a prayer – “may love never end.”

All around there is a promise of lasting unity. Legend has it that if you kiss your girl at the top of the bell tower, you will stay together forever. Many have had weddings out here, and it was tradition long ago for the bride and groom to be thrown into the lake after the wedding. If there is one thing I am sure of, it is that this is a place for love – a place to celebrate love, a place to create love, a place to think about love. If nothing else, there must be a lot of left over love floating around in the pond.

That is why I find it appropriate that today, floating on its back in the middle of the pond, there is a dead, bloated beaver. He is old enough to be wearing that rigid death jacket, but not old enough yet for the death smell. His eyes are closed and his arms are outstretched (toward what?). Perhaps he died longing for something, or (even more likely) longing for someone. Yes, he died thinking of someone he loved, and in a pitiful, last attempt (filled with sorrow and futility) he extended his arms to the sky. It seems offensive that this haven of togetherness should be tainted by the presence of death. But the beaver is an appropriate part of the scene (perhaps more fitting than the huge bell tower on the opposite side of the pond). Work is the thing that kills love. This beaver knows that, and so it calls out, saying: “Love today! Forget what you feel you must do and enjoy the company of one another; celebrate in what you have been given!” He reminds me that hours are quick, and they are better spent in good company. He exists here, dead in the middle of the pond, so that we may learn his lesson yet avoid his pain. Imagining his dying thoughts (knowing that he would die apart from the one he loved; knowing that all the time spent away was time wasted; longing for some type of reconciliation and forgiveness; seeking it in the empty air above him) fills me with a certain feeling I do not wish to describe.

And yet I, hypocrite that I am, sit here and (although I am alone) this place speaks to me too. Despite my neglect and the fact that I left a beautiful place in search of something (don't ask me what), this place still calls out to me, and I come. I come here and I think of you (my dear) and as I do I am sure that the spirit of this place reaches my soul. I have heard the prayer of the bells and I know love can last forever.

# The Body of Christ

**Bob Barrick**

The scent of embalming fluid  
from bearing the pall at my grandfather's funeral—

it's like a fresh cut melon crushed  
and sent through the garbage disposal,  
filling the kitchen with rich aroma  
and following me, even when I leave home.

I drive through the old parish,  
my ancestors standing in sepia  
upon each porch I pass,  
and I arrive at the Church of the Holy Cross,  
where the bell chimes for each grape reduced to wine.



“Escape to Tranquility” by Ritz Davison



# Antidepressants

Ella Paul

Sometimes  
I don't believe in anything  
but disappointment  
and the taste of light.



“Hat” by Maggie Carey



“Inside of Love” by Maggie Carey



“Meow” by Maggie Carey



“Roses” by Maggie Carey

(No Title)  
Tommy O'Rourke

Distilled crystals  
in the fine print.

A boy with transparent skin  
speaking  
in ellipses as  
black snow falls  
from his outstretched fingers.

He asks:  
*Do the stars feel  
themselves burning?*

The roar of lava spewing through new rifts of breaking glaciers.  
moving time moving

His tongue becoming  
rusted to the roof  
of his warm mouth.

Sitting in  
a bathtub of blue  
paint, he hums  
at random, and  
plugs every pore with planets:  
    everyday worlds  
    made solely to betray the silent agenda.



## Reaching Lilly

Jillian Wanbaugh

The trees were bare, twisting around themselves in a lifeless way. Some leaned, almost sagging with agony, while the rest remained erect, giving only the illusion of vigor. There were six of them; six black, dead trees forming a circle around her grave. Each wailed as the wind thrashed at their degenerate forms. Winter had eradicated autumn, mercilessly ravishing the land of all viability.

Hitting the ground with a force only a man of great stature could produce, the shovel broke through just a fraction of an inch. William knew he would have to try harder. Each strike had to serve a purpose, it had to leave a mark more devastating than the last if he wanted to unearth her bones before sunrise. He tried again, his arms tightening as the point of the shovel penetrated the glassy surface, deepening the gouge of his first attempt. Again. Knuckles white around the wooden handle. Again. He sliced away at the hardened dirt, like a butcher to fresh meat, allowing his body to move fluidly through the motions of his job. Digging, digging, digging. His muscles swelled with each cut of the soil. His heart, thumping violently, pushed blood more quickly through his veins, trying to warm his body as he fought against the frozen earth.

There was no stone marking her place. No evidence of her buried body, decaying alone under the frosted over dirt. Only the six, thin trees with winding branches, creating a canopy over the plot. And instead of one trunk, each tree consisted of several smaller ones, sprouting from the same spot, like long earthy fingers reaching from below. Underneath the soil, where, at the center, her body lied waiting for him to reach her wooden tomb that had become filled with dirt and creatures of the earth. He knew she would not like it down there, in the darkness, confined. She hated being anywhere but 'a place that is vastly open with the sun blazing down setting me on fire' as she would

say. Every where else made her heart quicken and her eyes widen. Then the scratching would start; she would tear at her own skin until her hands were bloodied and her face shinned with silently fallen tears.

Anger ignited with the thought. They didn't know her. Another slice. They never saw these things. Another. As William contemplated her demons his pace accelerated. His feet, rooted firmly to the ground as he lifted another large shovel full of condensed dirt, had been lost to the cold, his toes now feeling like small, foreign objects inside his thick but worn leather boots. He mustn't stop digging. Though his breath puffed like clouds of smoke from his mouth and his ears burned from frost, he mustn't stop.

The stars lit most of the open fields, casting a blue grey glow on everything they reached, but their light did not reach her spot. The canopy of dead branches was thick overhead, leaving William little illumination for his work. Still he toiled, purposefully, knowing with each scoop of dirt she became closer.

The wind continued with force. Each spidery tree moaned, speaking in low voices. He heard their encouragement to continue. Their words hung on his ear lobes, tickling the hairs on the back of his neck. They circled him, separating this world from the rest. This world of his and hers, blanketed by the earth.

His nose, now running profusely, left him forced to snort back mucus in between every few mouth drying gulps of air. Each breath traveled like ice down his throat. He could feel his lungs inflate with each intake, convincingly ready to crack and shatter, leaving shards amongst his organs. The skin on his fingers cracked every time he adjusted his grip. Several hours had passed since he began his excavation and his muscles ached for relief. Exhaustion had begun to cloud his mind while pain slithered around his body like a snake, biting and gnawing with each of his movements.

Thrusting the shovel point into the dirt again; it collided with an unseen object. His ears filled with the sound of rushing blood as his heart thumped more violently than ever before. His breathes drew shorter than ever before as a feeling of nausea rose from his abdomen. Throwing the shovel toward the mound that had grown beside the grave, he moved cautiously, sweeping the remaining dirt from the lid of the casket.

*This is it*, he thought to himself. *This is it*, six low voices hissed in echo.

A breeze, carrying notes of jasmine, patchouli, and grapefruit danced around him softly, as if winter had instantaneously been transfigured into spring. Her scent. He recalled it swirling around him when she walked through the air he breathed. And the way she walked, hips swinging with each hurried step.

Positioned precariously, one foot balanced on either side of the tomb, he reached down. His hands shook beyond control from expectancy and

cold. The wood was soft on his numb fingertips. With the last of his strength, William pulled the lid upward, lifting the cloak of discomfort, revealing what he had lost.

\* \* \*

The sun breached the horizon as dawn announced it's life giving presence. But that was not what woke Gloria Church. She woke to the sounds of shattering glass and her sons calling for her in a panic. In a bout of confusion, her body heavy from sleep, she wrapped it in a soft pink robe and hurried down the wooden stairs, each one creaking under her weight. She was never a thin woman, but since the death of her daughter, her weight grew as her depression deepened. Moving through the parlor room into the kitchen she found the source of her shattering wake up call. The door leading from the kitchen to the plowed wheat fields out back stood ajar, the glass from the window in pieces on the floor and a hole from the brass handle in the wall. Pausing only a moment, she continued through the threshold.

Gloria's ankles waded through the foggy mist that settled near the earth as she made her way closer to the elevated voices of her sons whom sounded incoherently panicked. Dead grass crunched and cracked as she hastily cleared the distance of one field, crossing through an old, unused electrical fence, entering another frosty winter tundra. She folded her arms across her chest, pulling the collar of her robe together, as a makeshift shield against the stabs of the bitter morning air. Though the deep echoes of James and Peter's voices guided her, she knew where she was going. To the very edge of their property; to where Lilly was buried.

She crossed the final stretch, lengthening her strides, carrying her more quickly to the morning scene. Among the circle of trees they had planted post funeral stood three men, all silent now, like statues, staring into the grave that should have been sealed. Her body became heavy, as if her blood turned to lead. As she approached, pressure built on each side of her head, dizzying her vision.

Her stomach turned when her eyes breeched the edge of the hole, seeing the grotesque portrait. Shock flooded her body first. There were the bones of her only daughter, disconnected, with what was once her favorite Sunday dress, now only tattered pieces of fabric hanging loosely around her remains. But she was not alone as she should have been. Lying next to her, his arms embracing what little remained of Lilly was the deceased, rigid body of William, a brutish, schizophrenic boy with a proclivity for his delusions, whom she had met during her time at the hospital.

The shock subsided only enough for confusion to set in. She looked to Peter, then her husband, then James, all wearing the same expression of horror. Before she could regain her ability to speak, James began to move,

slowly toward the grave. Gloria's husband moved to hinder him as he bent down, reaching toward the bodies, but his voice broke the silence in protest. Leaning back, he collapsed onto the earth like a weary child, revealing in his hand a small, folded piece of parchment. He opened it cautiously, ready for an ill-intentioned surprise. When nothing came, he read to himself, then a loud.

“She came to me. I had to find her.”

## Written on a wet page.

Tommy O'Rourke

I could spell it out  
in eyelashes but the invisible  
boa constrictors that spring out  
from your pupils  
to strangle and decipher  
every scribble are too busy shedding  
their scales to sound out "delicate."

Under this sheet of paper,  
a salmon slides shut her gills  
& doesn't speak  
nor blink nor narrow  
down a list of synonyms.

A salmon out of water with her gills slid shut can only stare.

Feeling uncomfortable, I  
wrap her in a music  
staff paper sheet of  
treble cleffed syllables &  
whole note semantics.

*What harmony is this?  
Which war?*

The strictly literal  
fish and snake did not once have  
a chance to escape  
the Technicolor nets

cast from plastic  
nests of 'perfect pitch' asphyxiation  
& flawless grammar.

Do not forgive a thing  
that calls you by name.

A house of mirrors is a home  
of nothings to sing  
alone and lose yourself in.

Forget the Other  
animals conjugate  
"be"  
as you see fit.

Am is  
the subtlest theology.  
A cracked wall-  
clock caricature, a second-  
hand annotated gospel. If  
such margins could speak,  
they'd say  
*there is no god but now*  
yet they remain  
the chapped lip silence:  
the white space  
between  
these letters.





“Reflection of Fate” by Ritz Davison

# Shadows

Donald Bradley

Oh silent strength  
don't vanish yet.

with you [in you]

wait [drip]

me up [drip] light

wait  
wait  
wait [drip]

[or do] don't kill me now

wait. [drip] light me

up

and grow move with

me

erode with me

lifting from muteness  
breaking like specters  
[move with me]

me wear me wear me wear

and grow

swallow pebbles and pearls and grind  
to rubble

black beetle, eat your butterflies

nothing and I am not:

I am tar and I am

not:

[now]

you love and wound  
and forget

I won't kill myself

you  
wait to grow Let us fall from blood sky and  
burnt mountains:  
collapse the forest  
and kill the fires  
and melt the ice  
and dry the oceans.

stop the wind

## Thumbnails

Katie Johnson

The test group was comprised of thirty children chosen in infancy: all unwanted pregnancies that would have been wasted in public institutions far inferior to ours, without the extensive opportunities for education, for progress. The children required no mothers in our program. Had they ever wished to know their origins, they might have perused the metal file cabinet in which all of their files were kept, right down to the looping signatures of the women who had signed their lives to us. They never did; they were taught better, instructed that origins were of little consequence when compared with the trajectory their lives would take.

We wanted to end the world's problems and its sufferings. We wanted to supply nations with a perfect advisor, one who could present information instantly on any topic. We wanted scientists and philosophers, brilliant minds that could be mass produced. We wanted to know that we were capable of creating such a thing.

The facility was constructed in the country, where the children could be monitored constantly and under no unwanted influence. They were educated by the finest instructors in mathematics, in chemistry and biology, in anatomy, small pink hands opening white stomachs with surgical precision. If they wondered at the twisting red life inside, they never said so. Curiosity was encouraged so long as research could be involved. An expansive library was provided, books on selected topics thought to be of benefit, within an established range of interests and education level. They were meant to be intelligent,

capable children of the right kind of mind, the correct moral standing, flexible enough to be shaped but rigid enough to avoid defiance.

We envied their cleverness for our own children, our children who laughed. Our children, with whom we grew increasingly impatient for their untidiness, their scraped knees, their *child-ness*. Our children, whose world we handed to them broken.

The procedure was performed when the test subjects were determined to have entered the period of formal operations in their cognitive development. Dressed in paper gowns, they showed no fear; what was there to be afraid of? When had they ever been taught to be afraid? The sharp intake of breath, tiny eyes squeezing shut at the first needle, was the only sign they showed of being children.

They emerged with shaved heads, surgical staples in sharp contrast to skin that had never been introduced to sunlight. Our alterations were already whirring in their brains, chips the size of a thumbnail powered by the brain's own electrical energy. With it they could know anything. They could know everything. They would save us.

We taught them how to use our miracle technology, taught them to think first in keywords, taught them to make connections between different pieces of information. This, of course, was the most uncertain stage in our research. This was the first phase of human testing, and we knew only that the surgery itself was survivable, had no idea of its effects on the brain outside of our charts and calculations.

They reassured us, placed their small hands on our shoulders in gestures of comfort.

"Don't worry," they said, mechanical minds blinking at us with blue eyes.

They quickly located the flaws in our anatomy. Illness, of course, had to be eliminated. Antidotes had to be located, treatments developed, therapies conceived, medications formulated. They cured disease, but could not cure hunger; death rates plummeted briefly, to our satisfaction. When they rose again we said it was only the planet maintaining itself, that this was a natural cycle in any progress. Things would normalize, stabilize; we would emerge stronger.

They located the missing receptors in our eyes. They taught us to see colors we were never meant to see; we saw the outlines

of things that had always been, things that existed just outside of our perception. Myths and legends made themselves known to us. The brief twitches that had once existed only out of the corners of our eyes took center stage and demanded to be seen, whether we wanted them or not. We touched the shape of impossibility and drew back in horror.

They did none of this unkindly, did nothing unkindly. They were children; we gave them knowledge and no wisdom. How could we give them something we did not have? We made a gift of our arrogance, assumed that we knew best, took children at birth and gave them new minds.

We dismantled our sleek glass buildings. We tore up our streets. We piled high the world we had built and burned what would burn. We threw salt on the roots of cities that had been and turned to the last uncertainty we had. We learned for ourselves the taste of the sea.

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