

## Thumbnails

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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.