

Sara Tracey

## St. Rocco's Home for Girls, 1941

For days, I waited in the usual spots:  
Lorenzo's grocery, our bench in Public Square,  
the playground behind St. Paul's. Even the club  
on Eighty-Eighth, a place I was ashamed to go.  
People there knew him as Johnny, laughed  
when I asked if he'd been in. I couldn't go  
to his home, but rode the bus past it, working  
his ring over my knuckle and back down, over  
and back down. Sunday last week, Euclid Beach  
between the boardwalk and the carousel, he dropped  
to one knee. We'd waste no time, he said, marry  
before anyone found out—only God would  
have to know. It was his sister who told me  
he'd been caught at the wheel of a stolen  
Oldsmobile, gave me a Zanesville address  
where I could write. We'd both be prisoners, I knew,  
and packed my things before I confessed. The home  
was not so different from my own. The sisters  
never smiled. We shared the work: cooking, sewing,  
scrubbing floors. At night, rooms crowded with girls  
like me, trying to hide their bodies out of habit  
though we were all there for the same reason. Some



knew what they were doing. Most only knew  
that saying yes meant their sweethearts would smile,

make promises. Those long months at St. Rocco's,  
we learned what yes really meant. Our bodies

gone haywire, swelling, stretching. Contractions  
like my mother wringing water from wet cloth.

