

Lisa Whealy
Tasting Hope

Out of the corner of her eyes, she saw a flash of yellow as the gray swam from her consciousness. Today was the first time her daughter had seen this, but she had certainly known the violence before. After she picked herself up off of the tiled kitchen floor and smoothed down the green striped tank top dress she tossed on that morning, she took her daughter's hand and ran out the door. With a slam and his screaming at her to get back in the fucking house, she listened to the kitchen faucet continue to run water over dirty dishes in the sink. Their beautiful blonde-haired daughter was only five. *No child should ever see that.* With neighbors who looked the other way, she had started to show her angel how to live this way. Why couldn't she have walked away when it was just her and not her baby too? *Like mother, like daughter.* She had to bring another person into hell with her, but somehow this made her circumstance even more horrible, hopeless and no longer bearable.

She hurriedly walked towards the street, her soapy right hand holding her daughter's tiny soft grubby one. She felt the bruise rising on her cheek in a rainbow of colors and pain as tears slid down her face. They approached the oak lined sidewalk in front of that brownish colored house they had lived in for the last five hellish years. He hit her, again. He reacted when she asked if he really needed another drink; she spoke without a thought or a chance to duck. As she walked down this dusty street she thought. *How stupid I was to say that.* He had no patience for her or their daughter when he was drunk, but to her defense it was only four thirty in the afternoon. Shadows began to cover a road which led out of his life into a place living unknown in her imagination.

Her baby stumbled on a crack in the grayness of sidewalk in her too big tennis shoes, and the mother's sobs became more audible the farther from the house they got. *Step on a crack, break your mother's back. Another skinned knee kept from happening.* Her daughter had joined in her mom's crying at some point, maybe out of fear of a near fall; the sound of her daughter's tears made all in this moment more real. She had not thought about where they would be walking towards, but walking away from him could do nothing but good. Looking up, she noticed fragrant rose bushes blooming red and pink along the sidewalk, and heard a humming bird flit by. *Have these always been here?* The sound of an ice cream truck bled into the terror. Both of them were feeling from different spots in reality. She would later tell the police while filing a report she had never seen an ice cream truck in their neighborhood. Never once in five years.

As the ice cream man came around the corner ahead of them in that perky purple and white truck, her daughter walked with a spring in her step toward the sound. Her dirty yellow dress began to swing in the way a little girl's dress does when hurrying towards happiness. She looked up at her mother and took her free hand and wiped away silent tears that had stained her face. Horrified, her mom realized in getting out she had left everything behind including her purse, wallet, and of course money. As the truck glided to a stop next to them, she looked at her daughter and up at the smiling driver with a horrified swivel of her head. He looked down at them in his crisp white shirt. He reached into the freezer and pulled

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out two ice cream sandwiches wrapped in red and white paper wrappers; they steamed as he looked over his customers. Leaning over the counter with a smile, he handed them to this woman with the blackened eye and her child with a rumped dirty yellow dress and sunshine colored hair. He turned, got back in his seat, started the engine, and drove down the street. Twinkling music shared some cheer the next block over.