

Make-Believe

by Tawnysha Greene

Every year, Momma volunteers to lead the outreach service at church and teaches us all Easter songs, how to mime the stories behind them. The church gives her a stereo to use, bed sheets for us to wear as costumes, and at the end of March, the month of April, Momma drives the church van down the mountain where the convalescent homes are.

My cousin comes with us, plays John, the disciple Jesus loves, and is seamless when she becomes him, a man who asks Jesus who will betray him, who cares for his mother when Jesus dies. I play Peter who falls asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane, cuts off the Roman servant's ear when they take Jesus away, and falls to his knees when he hears the cock crow. My sister plays Jesus.

We go to a new hospital each week and as the nurses wheel the patients into the lobby, we put on our costumes and mime the story as Momma sits by the stereo, makes the music loud. My sister pretends to ride a donkey into Jerusalem, eat with her disciples, and pray in the garden. We watch Momma for cues, look to Jesus when we eat together for the last time, and cry when we see our Lord being whipped, tied to a post, on his head a crown of thorns. My sister plays like Momma had taught her to do, pretends everything's real, that the cross is heavy, that the walk to Golgotha is long. When Jesus is crucified, she holds her hands out to the side, looks up to the sky, and gives her spirit to God.

The nurses, people in wheelchairs, tubes in their throats, are quiet, eyes wandering, and when the songs are over, we take our costumes off and go sit next to them, pray for Jesus to come into their lives. I walk to a lady by the window, who doesn't sit with the others, but who watches us just the same, ask her for her name, and if I can pray for her, too. She takes my hand, doesn't let go, calls me child, says things I don't understand.

Her eyes are sad as she looks to the other kids, to me, and I want to stay, but our time is done, and Momma motions for us to leave as

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she takes the stereo, waves goodbye, and ushers us out the door. On the ride home, Momma tells my sister, the other kids what to do next time, to face the audience more, to move around the stage, be happy, sad in certain scenes. I listen absently, watch the hospital get smaller and smaller behind us as we head back up the mountain, and think of the way the lady by the window smelled of soap, her fingers on my hands, her skin fragile, thin like moth's wings.

