

White Lies

by Tawnysha Greene

When I lie about whether I've washed my hands, cleaned my room, Momma whips out a wooden spoon from her purse, a spoon held together with duct tape, broken many times. When I lie to Daddy, he pulls a tool from the garage, the tool with a serrated edge for cleaning the grill, spans me fifteen times, counting under each breath, but I only lie to him once.

But before Grandma comes over, Momma sits us down, tells us to tell her that our refrigerator is empty, because we cleaned it, that our food is in a freezer in the garage, that we have a washer and dryer and the clothes hanging to dry over the bathtub are the ones that couldn't be washed, the ones that would shrink. Momma tells us to smile, to keep her and Daddy's bedroom door closed, so that Grandma won't find the food stamps, the bills Momma has hidden in her dresser drawers.

When Grandma's gone, Momma dresses us up in our church clothes, types up a speech about a charity for the deaf, asking for donations. She sits in front of me, makes me practice reading the lines, tells me to look up, makes my sister stand beside me, smile silently, sign hello for good measure.

She drives us to the mall, to the shopping outlets, tells me to ask for the manager before I give my speech, before my sister begins to sign. Momma says that checks are okay, should be made out to her, because she's the owner of the charity, not to tell them she's our mother. She says to say thank you, to take their business cards.

On these days, while Momma counts the money, we go to Blockbuster where we can pick a movie each, play on the playground at McDonalds, lick tall ice cream cones.

