

Hunger

by Constance Malloy

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The multi-headed, bloated beast laughs: all mouths wide-open, bile spewing. Its guffawing shakes the very belly it burns.

That's my belly burning, I remind myself.

The young girl sits on the doorstep, naming clouds and drawing flowers in the dust. It's dinnertime, and the air is filled with the comingled smells of meat and sweet potatoes. Her stomach growls.

"Shh," she says. "He'll be here soon."

Her father, always home by 5:30, is late. It's nearing 6:00.

A car comes around the corner, pulls into the drive. The familiar sounds of rubber on pavement intensify her hunger.

An hour later, the policemen leave.

Dinner is forgotten. It is folded into the tears and the loss. Her appetite is dried and crumbles like the handful of dirt she throws upon his coffin.

"Why aren't you eating, Mommy?" my son asks.

"I'm waiting for your father?" I return. "He should be home soon."