

THE GIRL

the girl had a faded scar from her left ear
to her right knee. and missing front teeth.

she was eating an ice-cream. half of it melting.
running down her bitten dry lip, thin chin,
through her bony fingers round her muscleless
arm in a slow sugary stream. into her lap.
her knickers were heavily soiled. i assume, in—
as much as on the outside. she also wore sandals.

she was six. but looked no older than four.
not that i knew, but that's what i resolved to
believe right there. looking at her. eating my own
ice-cream on the opposite bench. from the same
ice-cream van. mine with a flake. hers – without.
the autumn was warm allowing of summer treats.

the autumn was warm, but still demanding of
layers. the girl didn't shiver, but her skin was of
blueish tint and bumpy with chill. her mother
too busy to notice in the arms of who didn't
seem like the father, but of more prominent station.
i reckoned from mother's keen. and his knuckles.

the girl finished the ice-cream, as the mother
finished the hand-job. each wiped her hand on her
hip. the mother – on satin skirt, the daughter –
on cotton scanties. the man lit a fag and left. didn't pay.
didn't look back either. the woman painted her lips.
hot pink. while the child peed by the bench.

they left holding hands. palms sticky with sweat,
ice-cream, and semen. the woman hummed, the girl
hopped on one foot. her thin ponytail bouncing
on birdly spine. they awayed to the tower blocks.
i stood up. continued my afternoon journey. sweet lump
in my throat – the flake and the sudden sick.

she was six. but looked no older than four.
my daughter. when cancer took her twelve years ago.