

# A Short Story of Hope

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One Tuesday night in the late summer of 2013, we crawled into bed early. After returning on Monday from a weekend trip to Omaha, we were tired. Sleep came easily as the fan softly whirred overhead.

The next conscious moment was lived in disjointed flashes—my brain frantically trying to contextualize dreams with reality, sound with sight. I don't remember even turning on the light or getting out of bed, just being above Katherine. She lay face down in the corner of our bedroom, legs splayed out unnaturally, wrapped in our bed sheets, her head jammed down between the bedside table and the wall. I gingerly wrapped my arms around her torso and carefully lifted her up, now suddenly conscious of her scream.

I turned her toward me and her face was covered in blood. My measured tone belied my quivering nerves as the source of the blood seemed to be coming from her eye, her "good" eye. I helped her up and calmed her. I quickly ascertained the wound was on the eyebrow bone, not the eye—THANK YOU LORD! But when the gash opened and I could see the bone, like a ravine through the flesh, I briskly walked to the bathroom as I felt I might pass out myself. I splashed some cold water on my face and took a few quick deep breaths, then jumped back into the bloody fracas, bringing ice and towels and a single Band-Aid that seemed almost comical.

Katherine, in typical self-effacement, wondered why I was making such a big deal about it all. She began to weep at the thought of waking James and shuttling him to our neighbor's house for an impromptu sleepover. The ripple effects of her issues on her family are always the most deeply troubling to her. I somehow convinced her to come with me to the ER as James would actually love the midnight, bed swapping adventure and my at-home sewing skills might actually give her a Spock-like, perma-raised eyebrow.

We made it to UCLA's ER in no time, quickly traversing the usually-busy interstate. Going to this particular place might make a normal person's pulse quicken and stomach alight with butterflies, but for us, going to a hospital strangely feels like going home. It is a place where we can find safety and help. And if the worse thing happens, like it did, all will be well if we are there.

The waiting room was dimly lit and quiet, save for a few sporadic, disheveled inhabitants. We surprisingly made it to an examination room within half an hour. When the on-call doctor arrived, I took the lead explaining Katherine's history and what I ascertained had happened. That perceived-forcefulness, as well as an ill-timed joke from Katherine about me pushing her out of bed, resulted in the doctor asking me to step outside of the room. For a moment, I felt slapped in the face. I was the one woken up from a dead sleep for an ER visit, and now, the insinuation is that I might be to blame. Like the logical thought-process involving airport security, I realized such precautions are founded in real threats. Even those of us who are innocent must be subjected to the same scrutiny as those who are to blame, all for the greater good. My heart suddenly broke for those women forcibly brought to that same ER by men who don't feel the same unstoppable goodwill for them that I feel for my wife.

As I re-entered, Katherine was engaging conversation with her nurse and the doctor, both of whom were amazed at her post-stroke recovery, having read her medical history. These are the opportunities that our story allows, the personification of intangible hope in flesh and bone, in story. We gave our "Hope Heals" card to these new hearers, and directed them to our short film. "I might cry," the nurse lamented. "Maybe", Katherine said, "but wait for the end. It's the best part...the hopeful part."

As they began stitching back together the broken place, I instinctively turned on our iPod and began rubbing Katherine's feet to bring some level of distraction. A song called "Beautiful Things", by Gungor, came on.

*All around*

*Hope is springing up from this old ground*

*Out of chaos life is being found in You*

Not one to sit with awkward silences for long, Katherine told the doctor, "We're Christians, in case you couldn't tell by the music, is it OK if we play this?" To which the doctor replied, "As long as it's not hate-filled, of course. I want you to be comfortable".

*You make beautiful things*

*You make beautiful things out of the dust.*

The song ended, and Katherine's eyebrow was now re-defined with a row of stitches nearly spanning its full length. Broken places mended. The doctor whispered, "That was beautiful". And it was.

*You make beautiful things*

*You make beautiful things out of us*

Our paradigm on suffering continues to shift and grow more nuanced. As we find sacrifice to be more and more the central theme of love and the gospel, we must ask ourselves how they all connect. We must move beyond the tips of our own noses, not even just to those we ourselves love but to the world that God loves. What if the major good resultant from our pain inures not to our own benefit but to the benefit of a stranger?

We see humanity with different eyes when we recognize that we may be asked, like Christ, to sacrifice things we hold dear so that someone else, perhaps someone we will never know, might find the hope that they need.

Are we willing to lay down on altars or hospital beds, enduring all manner of loss, so that something truly lost might be found, so that someone might be beloved? This is our calling—to play our role in divine appointments, to be vessels overflowing with hope.

Just three days prior, we spoke at a church in Omaha, and that same song played before we shared. We spoke about the nature of hope through suffering. Katherine said, “What is true in the light, is true in the darkness.” Those words were not so much TESTED a few days later as they were PROVEN to be trustworthy. “Hope does not put us to shame”, says Paul, and we are given more and more chances to have the words of our mouths transformed into authentic, real-life opportunities to trust God.

We drove home on the even quieter interstate around 3am. We pulled through a 24/7 drive thru for an ice cream cone to share. We settled back into bed, but sleep hardly came as easily as it had much earlier that night. I subconsciously wrapped my arm over Katherine with a steely, seatbelt-like resolve—not the most comfortable but perhaps the most comforting, for us both.

We know all too well that none of us know what tomorrow holds, but in reality, none of us even know what tonight holds, while we sleep. It’s unnatural, against every animal instinct in our bodies to release ourselves into that reality, but God calls us there to that place where He is. “Lose your life and you will find it”, Jesus said. As life continues and with it struggles and with them hope, we find ourselves losing our grips on the things we don’t even know we are holding so tightly. And yet, we finally find our rest, secure in arms more capable, more loving, more alive than our own.