

Grit

Under the porch there is a dark, cool place. A place far away from the hot summer sun and the toadstools lurking in the grass which slid like baked onions under my bare feet. A place to hide from the fat ants in the garden who bit my toes and wouldn't let go. And to hide from that lady who came yesterday to take away the grey kitty, the "runt of the litter." To put it to sleep. *To kill it.*

I look up. The sky is shining between the porch boards, long powder blue lines with fluttering poplar leaves and black branches high above. The wind blows, and paint chips and sand fall into my eyes. I rub and the bits fall from my eyelashes onto the dirt I'm kneeling in.

Brown soil and stones and lumps below. The lumps are dusty and sandy, but inside they feel like plasticine. They smell strong, acid. They come from cats. I knead a few together to make a tiny loaf of bread, then place it in one of the lemon sunbeams to bake.

I draw with my finger beside my knees, a mean-faced stick woman made of mountains and valleys. The dirt looks like chocolate cake mix. A handful crunches between my teeth, like the grit in toothpaste except bigger. It tastes metallic, like old, dead things. Spit out the larger rocks and pebbles one by one then mix the dirt with saliva, mixing and mixing until it's mud. Spit that out, too.

Above, the front door squeals. Sand and more paint chips fall from the thundering porch boards. *Mom calling. Calling for me.* Her voice is like a thousand angels blowing trumpets. I close my eyes. *Hiding.* Mud drips off my chin onto my T-shirt as I cover my ears and turn myself into a silent nothing.

Later, I crawl out from under the porch and slide on my belly across the dark lawn like a snake, past the push mower with its rusty blades and rickety wheels. I see

the clump of purple pansies with their yellow faces, and begin a four-legged gallop towards them, the way the runt of the litter used to run, sideways and awkward. Once I reach the flowers, I stick my nose into their centres, inhaling the pollen like a bee.

Yellow, like the sunshine.

They smell so good, like bruised green stems and purple sunshine. Their petals are thin, soft lips on mine.

A bumblebee floats, buzzing, near the patch of pansies and nearer to me, so I run across the lawn to the kitchen door. The bee can have its stupid, bitter flowers. They do not taste as good as they smell.

"Janie, I was *calling* you," my mother says.

I remain silent as she sponges the grit from my face.

472 words