

Dust Rolls Up
(1 pg only per author's request)

I climb on up into the school bus, and Miss Hilda throws her shoulders into yanking the handle that shuts the door. I swear, she tries to slap me on the ass every time I'm last in, which is usual for me. It's hot as the devil's temper in the bus, but the ride home is still the best part of my day.

Miss Hilda's got her eyes in the mirror, watching the herd, but she gives me a nod and a side smile as I pass. As usual, the seat next to Nisha is open, so I sit with her. It's not peculiar for her to end up sitting alone, even when the bus is jam packed, because the Black girls all think she's high yella trying to rise, while the White girls all think she's Black, and it's not peculiar for me to sit with her, as everybody just thinks I'm trash.

Walking back, it's all noise and body odor, just like any classroom might be, plus diesel exhaust from the buses lined up next to us. I sit down and put my hands on my thighs, and the back of my left hand brushes soft against her skirt.

As soon as Miss Hilda cranks the engine, Nisha, still facing forward, glances over and starts talking, just under the noise of the engine. "Did your daddy tell you about his walk down to the river last night?"

"He came back wet and angry as a catfish on a hook. He said he had to go in to untangle a line, and then there was no fish in the traps."

She smiles as big as you please, teeth white as a brand-new stove. "Did he say anything about Daisy?"

"Didn't have much of a chance. Mom and I both keep our distance when he's in a mood."

"Well," she says, "my daddy's down in New Orleans, and without him around, Daisy does whatever she wants. When she saw your daddy walking past our house, she went after him. She didn't even bark. She just tore off after him and chased him all the way down the boat ramp and into the river."