

Descanso

by Jane Hammons

The highway from the railroad crossing to my house is covered with little white crosses for people who die in wrecks. One cross is for the whole Hopson family. They got it the night Mr. Hopson tried to beat the train in a pick-up full of him and his wife and eight kids in the back.

I take rosaries from the crosses but I leave the plastic flowers. My friend Lupe says *descanso* means resting place in Spanish and I shouldn't steal rosaries because I am a Methodist and what do I want them for anyway.

In kindergarten Rose Hopson always put her nap towel next to mine. Once I whistled, not breezy like a song. Loud. The kind for calling dogs.

The teacher says Who can't be quiet? Who can't follow rules? She asks the same way she says CAT C-A-T DOG D-O-G poking the words on the blackboard with her sharp stick. She takes her wooden paddle out of a drawer that is made just for it. Not telling is the same as lying, she says. She walks around the room tapping the paddle in the palm of her hand.

I lie between Rafael and Rose. Rafael Sanchez has nice pants with cuffs and Rose and me have dresses to our knees. Her legs are skinnier and whiter than mine. Her towel spreads out like a spider web.

The teacher calls Rafael up to the desk. He takes the paddling.

Rose Hopson was a Baptist.

Lupe says stealing is bad whether it's from a Baptist or a Catholic.

She won't be friends with a thief. And a liar.

Esther Candelaria's cross has more than a dozen rosaries. I take the one with beads like pomegranate seeds and give it to Rose. I keep the one with blue raindrops for myself.

