

Ants

by Lori Lou Freshwater

I don't know what happened to all the men. Used to wonder if they killed them all. For a while I even thought maybe they just kept hatchin' girls all by themselves in some secret spot out in the woods where all the howls came from.

I called them all by Aunt, but come to find out some of them weren't really my aunt they were cousins or friends of cousins. One afternoon I was in the house on Brick Street when one of them told me to wash the collards. "I don't want to," I said.

"I don't care what you want, Ms. fancy pants. Now get on in there and wash those collards before I have to go and get a switch," she hollered back.

Then another one of them came marching in the room, shaking the whole floor and the earth underneath with every step, and she looked at me real serious and said, "Girl, don't you know if you eat collards they'll give you big boobs? You want to be the only woman in this family without big boobs?" I just stood there, and wished I could blink my eyes or wiggle my nose like on TV and make myself disappear. But the snap of her kitchen towel on the side of my leg got me into motion quicker and better than any magic spell ever would have.

I went into the kitchen where it was even hotter than in the other rooms. They had been bakin' cornbread all that morning and the tiny tiny window over the sink was no help and the air just stood still. I walked over to the scratched-white basin that one of them had filled with warm water. I started to take the collards out of the paint bucket on the floor and put them into the water. Once they were in, I got up on my toes and I pressed the collards down, and up with the rising water came biggest and scariest hundred-legged black bug you have ever seen. I screamed and jumped up and down up and down and one of them came in and yelled, "That child ain't right in the head!"

I ran straight past her toward the screened-door hoping like anything it wasn't locked, and when it wasn't I kept goin' straight through a bed of fireants that had turned up beneath the willow tree.

