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We are all sitting on the doorstep with the other kids from next door. Some of the girls are twisting bits of their hair around and around into little strings, one at a time. The boys are throwing stones at some bottles. We are sitting on the doorstep, listening to the sounds of lives passing.

Hanging around.

Nudging each other with our elbows to point out something good to look at...like a bird when it flies past and tries to land on that little prickly bush across the street.

We've put a couple of old bottles in the bush and they glint in the sun and attract the birds. We imagine the bottles could be glinting out a kind of signal, a code.

It's hot and dusty and the summer air is sharp with distant shots and rumbles.

We are restless.

There's no school, but it's not really holiday days...those deliberately endless days with nothing much to do and no one expecting things of you. We're not allowed to go anywhere or do much so it's boring, and that makes it kind of frightening all at the same time. Boring and frightening.

Our mothers tell us there is always a job to do if we are bored! Some washing to hang out, or the little ones to mind, or some sweeping.

But it's too hot.

We'd rather sit here and hang around leaning on each other, chit chatting. We push and shove each other, and tease a bit. And watch the horizon. And wonder...

What are we going to do today? There's nothing to do.

We live in a village at the end of a narrow road. The road is one car's width so you have to pause for passing cars when you're driving along. It's like a kind of pocket at the end of a road that threads its way in and out again. One road in and one road out, that's what we say, tho' it's really the same road. Generally you can see that someone is coming to the village by a little whiff of dust forming on the road at the horizon, though that depends on the wind.

Usually we are waiting for someone to walk down our street with chat or news. Even news of dust, we'd be glad of a change.

A gust of wind sends some dry grass spinning past.

Hey there!

We've heard talk that one day this place will be cleaned up, mopped up, and that none of us can escape it. We imagine it's just one day of work to stop the boredom so we are all resigned to it. On this dusty hot boring day

we're waiting for the cleaning and mopping up thing to start.

Between us we imagine a woman, maybe one of our mothers or aunts, with a mop in one hand and a bucket in the other. A blue bucket with a cone-shaped lid where you twist the mop head to squeeze the water out of it. We imagine her in a pale blue gingham house-coat over her jeans and t-shirt; to keep her real clothes clean and to make us know that she is in charge, a sort of uniform.

We imagine she'll have lots of different rags for cleaning, like at home. Some of them might be old undies so we'll try to wear them and mess around. We imagine she will be a bit annoyed by that and we'll be a bit cheeky to her but then get on with it. The rags will be different colours for different dirt. So, maybe a yellow one for dusty chairs, and a flowery patterned one for the sink. There are rules for rags. And there are rules for the plastic bottles of cleaning stuff. Don't put it Near your Eyes and Wear Gloves.

We imagine lots of gloves and we will fight about who will get to wear them. Even though we know they are not ever for us. We are almost looking forward to it, but we won't admit to each other that it could be fun, well at least a change from just sitting and watching and throwing stones at bottles.

Hey there!

The voice is big. We scramble up from the steps and untangle ourselves. We notice that there is a lot of dust on the horizon in the distance. We whisper to each other and lean in close, the little ones straining up to see. We are not bored. We imagine she is coming with her mop and broom and bucket and rags.

When she comes she is not wearing a house-coat over jeans.

When she comes she is an army of cleaners. She is a man. He is many men.

She is a nation.

He is a middle-aged general; and a foot soldier; a determined tank driver; a new recruit.

She is a young conscript with a fresh face unshaven and eyes paled by dust and fear.

He is heralded by an horizon of dust.

She brings the promised cleaning and mopping up.

He is hope and fear.

She is weary of dust and rubble.

We are not bored. We are frightened. We step away from the voice and the doorstep.

We imagine they believe that they carry the muscular solution for all problems pocketed away at the end of the threadlike road into our village.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Helen Idle.