

## Dusty – by Sarah Rinehart

Scraps of paper lay scattered on the ground, in the dust of a flat white plain that stretched for miles. The wind picked up and swirled around the body of a girl, beaten and tossed aside. Her features were dull, as if drained of color; even her shocking black hair in contrast to the bland surroundings seemed to be slowly turning a silvery gray.

The scraps of torn pages swirled around her, caught up in an unnatural wind. The girl's hair blew and her clothes tugged at her body, and the wind's strength pried her arms apart, opening her unseeing eyes, and forcing her to relax her clenched fists.

The wind suddenly dropped, replaced by an impossibly still silence that enveloped the entire plain. It was as if a heavy blanket had been thrown over the world.

Then a slight breeze stirred, and with it, the dust seemed to gather and to form into an almost human face that crept closer to the girl. It examined her still eyes, the color of the ocean, and then swept over to her pale hand, where a tiny bottle shone like a pearl against the skin of her palm. Inside, a drop of deep blue liquid sat against the glass.

The dust drew back, afraid yet awed.

A dusty hand materialized and made to grab the bottle, but wasn't solid enough to hold it, and in its frustration, the dust punched the ground and exploded into a thousand tiny particles that were blown away in the wind.

The dust pouted, and then turned to consider the girl. She was so still and pale, her colors bleeding onto the ground like ink seeping into the hungry page. *She could help me.*

The hand materialized again, and hovered above the girl's face. A stream of pure white streamed from the dust into the girl, and color flowed back into her. Suddenly she

gasped and breathed, fully alive. Groaning, she rolled onto her side, clutching her stomach.

The dust smiled, looking a little greyer than before. On a strong breeze, the dust swirled around her, along with the broken pages. She looked up at the dusty face with a mixture of fear and curiosity as an expression. The dust smiled, and motioned to her hand that she held the bottle in. She opened her fist, only to see fragments of broken glass and blue liquid against her palm. Blood seeped from where the glass had broken her skin, leaving like trails as it dripped off her hand into the white dust. The dust cocked its head, smile fading.

Then, off in the distance, thunder rumbled and dark clouds began to gather. The wind picked up and began to move violently, energy fizzing in the air. Suddenly the storm was over head and lightning split the sky. And it began to rain, in torrents, gales, thousands upon thousands of fat raindrops falling from the black clouds.

The dust looked blissfully up at the heavens, rejoicing in the storm and rain and wind. And suddenly the dust looked more solid and real than before, compacting together into a full body of clay, a completed structure.

And as abruptly as it had come, the storm was gone. But the plain of dust was changed. Shoots of green began growing at impossible rates, the sky seemed a little bluer, and the sun seemed to shine a little brighter.

The girl looked around in wonder, and then turned to the dust, which had become the clay. It offered her a hand.

“You have saved me. Now I will heal you.” Its voice was rich and the girl felt a sense of safety and trust when she heard it. She took the hand and watched as her bloody hand healed itself, and suddenly felt well rested and rejuvenated.

“Follow me.”