

Summer of the Flying Ants

I was armed with a tennis racket—it was the weapon we had all fought over because it had the most surface area, and the key to whacking an insect out of the air is surface area. Both of my brothers held ping pong paddles. My sister, the youngest, wielded a whiffle ball bat. It was just before sunset in late July, which was when the flying ants flew through our backyard in opaque droves. They didn't do us any harm, but we liked to pretend that they might, that they were sent to wreak havoc upon our small cabin in the middle of the woods. The four of us were the self-appointed warriors sent to protect it.

When the battle began, we released the war cries that only two eleven-year-olds, a nine-year-old and an 8-year-old could. There was something so sadistically satisfying about hearing the soft *thunk* of an enemy soldier connect with the sharp wire of my tennis racket. My sister, barely tall enough to reach even the lowest-flying ants, swung the bat aimlessly in the air, shrieking in delighted horror at the swarm that flew just over her head. My brothers were more strategic with their approaches; they both wanted to join the Marines when they were older and took every opportunity to pretend they were in *Jarhead*. They ducked behind trees and crept around corners, talking to each other as if through a set of walkie-talkies.

When the battle was over, and the dirt road behind our house was blanketed with a layer of ant carcasses, I turned my weapon over in my hands. Ants don't bleed like humans do—it's darker and smells like rotten fruit. I remembered the month before, when I refused to go fishing because I didn't want to use live worms as bait. Instead, I spent the day sneaking the live ones from tackle boxes and releasing them into the soft mud where the water met the trees. As I wiped away the shards of paper-thin wing from my racket, I wondered what made the ants any different.