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Dust Bowl Poetry

Dorothy Rose

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DUST BOWL

— *changing life* —

WATER CARRIER

The sun is a ball of fire
It glares at the edges
As it rips through the cloudless sky
Dust hangs in the air
Flies gnats and hornets swarm
Around the cotton choppers
Men women and older children
Sweat and bend their backs
As they fight to save the crops

Weeds and grass multiply
Crawl and stretch their greedy roots
For space light and water as they
Choke the tender young cotton stalks

A cool breeze is nowhere to be found
Except for now and then when
A spiral teases the cotton patch
With its whirlwind as it dances by

Bobby Joe and I carry fresh water
To the workers in the field
In a galvanized bucket
Covered with a damp cloth
On a pole with the pail of water
Hanging between us
We trudge off from the house
Toward the south treeless forty
At two o'clock in the hot afternoon

I wear my poke bonnet
Bobby Joe his floppy straw hat
We do not know thirst
We go through the cow pasture
We play with the calves
We throw sticks for Old Red to fetch
We turn field turtles on their backs
We stop to watch a doodlebug
We throw rocks into the pond
We touch leaves on bushes
To watch them close and open again
We pick wild berries and turn cart wheels

Bobby Joe lies down
To watch an ant hill
Then he kicks it to pieces

I pick lupines black-eyed Susans
Chase butterflies

Suddenly we remember the water bucket
We each grab an end of the pole
And hurry on to the field
Sloshing all the way

As we reach the workers I complain
Daddy this is a hard job
It's boiling out here
It's a long way to walk
From the house to the field
Bobby Joe and I get tired
Carrying this old bucket

Then Daddy straightens his back
Looks me over and says
God willing Becky Sue
Come next year
I'm making a hoe
Just your size
Your water-carrying days will be over then

POETRY

— by Dorothy Rose

— *Beckoning California* —

THE POT OF GOLD

I am about twelve
The middle of summer
Hot and dusty in Oklahoma
Thunder lightning dark clouds rush on

A rainbow laughs

In less than three minutes
Hail big as golf balls
Has machine-gunned large ripe melons
Melons that would have gone to market tomorrow

A rainbow vanishes

I look up into my father's eyes
I see a man
An extension of the barren earth
Ripped open like the wasted crops
Too many years of blizzards
Floods tornadoes cyclones droughts

California beckons

— *a change of environment* —

DEAR MARY LOU

You wouldn't believe
The things they have in Tulsa
We visited Aunt Stella there
Last week

They have a toilet in the house
Before we knew what it was
Pretty Boy sailed his boat in it
Ruby Nell washed her doll clothes in it
and I gave the cat a drink from it

When Aunt Stella explained
What it was for
Pretty Boy was afraid to sit on it
So we just let him
Pull the chain
When we used it

Aunt Stella made ice tea
We ran for bowls and spoons
But found that ice tea

Is very different
From ice cream
You drink it from a glass
It tastes like medicine

We ran to the railroad
To watch the train go by
Ruby Nell counted 87 hobos
I counted 105 box-cars.
Pretty Boy threw rocks at it

We heard an airplane in the sky
Everyone ran outside to watch.
Uncle Zeke said
If God meant us to fly
He'd of give us wings
Daddy said
Zeke That's dumb
If he'd meant us to wear clothes
He'd of give us fur or feathers

Mamma got real embarrassed
You know
The thought of anybody
Being naked

So then Grandpa changed the subject
to that awful
President Hoover

The thing we liked best
Was the electric lights
One beautiful bulb
Hangs from the ceiling
Suspended in mid-air
Like your own special star

Well I've gotta close now Mary Lou
I want to go play with Zelda Prichett
She told me all about
That Santa Claus stuff yesterday
She promised to tell me
About that God stuff today

And she says there's something
Fishy about
That stork bringing baby stuff too

With love your cousin Jessie Mae
Rural Route #1 Box 13
Custer Oklahoma