Dust Bowl Poetry

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— 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
— 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