Intermezzo in Dust

Norman Toedt*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1943 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress). http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
Intermezzo in Dust

Norman Toedt

Abstract

YOUR breath comes in short, quick gasps. Your tongue feels dry and swollen as you monotonously explore each crack and crevice of your mouth-your teeth are harsh and rough and the irritating coat of dirt on their edges will not come off...
YOUR breath comes in short, quick gasps. Your tongue feels dry and swollen as you monotonously explore each crack and crevice of your mouth—your teeth are harsh and rough and the irritating coat of dirt on their edges will not come off. Your lips feel cracked and stiff, and your throat is coated with a dry, clinging dust. Each breath seems to rend the ribs within your chest, and you must make a conscious effort to hold your mouth wide in order to breathe at all. You feel your hair matted to the top of your head from dried and caked perspiration—sweat that runs into your eyes and tickles the back of your neck and makes the remnant of shirt cling stubbornly to your body.

But you hear the rope once more as it slaps and bangs against the side of the barn. Then you see it draw tight against the track—and when it creaks and groans as only a straining rope can do you know the next forkful of hay is coming. You will have to get up and move out of its way. Slowly you pull one foot beneath you—the fork is halfway up—how the sweat-soaked legs of your overalls cling to the skin—then a lunge and a flail of the arms and you stumble to the side—the fork hits the track with a solid thud and the moving mountain of hay swings toward you. Then a click—a silence—and the barn shakes beneath and about you. A gust of air sweeps by carrying leaves and chaff and dust with it—into your eyes goes the dust—and into your wide-open mouth and throat. The leaves have gotten into your shirt and are scratching as only alfalfa leaves can scratch.

But it is time to rub your eyes now—it is time to scratch your itching back. A pile of hay even higher than your head lies before you—and it must be torn apart and spread—next forkful will soon be up—got to be done before it comes—hay will heat and spoil if you don't. You drive your fork into the mountain and pull with all you have. Your shoulders scream in pain and your back has reached its limit—and more. But the mountain will not budge—and you try another spot with the fork—have to hurry—another forkful will soon be coming. You try to move but stand-
Sketch

ing hip-deep in the loose hay you stumble and fall headlong into the sea of stems and leaves. Up again—and pull again—pull 'til your lungs burst—pull 'til your arms leave the sockets from which they come—shove back the hay—far into the corner—tear apart the mountain before you—tear it to shreds and spread it out—pull—pull—pull!!

The next load is coming—just two more forksful now—just a little more and then you'll be safe. If only the dust were not so dry—if only that fork would wait a bit—but the rope is slapping—the rope is creaking—the rope is bringing another load—and more dust—and more hay—and more pulling—

Mine

Carolyn Carlson

'This is my life,
Given to me to live in my own way—
With all of my strength.

The sunset after evening rain—
Breakers careening against the cliff,
Sun-scented oats lying in shocks ready for the hay rack,
Carillon bell tones from a cloud-puffed sky,
Steel cold in winter.
Morning mists hiding in the valleys.
Hot, thick sand underfoot.
A dog wriggling into my arms, a rough tongue glancing across my face.
Cold sheets and rough scratching blankets,
Rain beating into my eyes, wet clothes clinging.
Stinging hail, wind cutting through.
Returning home the first time—the spire of the courthouse above the cornfields—
Pump handles banging, screen doors slamming on summer afternoons.

All these are mine and the world's to share.