

A NOVEL BY NEWBERY MEDALIST

KAREN HESSE

*Out of
the Dust*



Includes AFTER WORDS™ bonus features

 SCHOLASTIC

Beginning: August 1920

As summer wheat came ripe,
so did I,
born at home, on the kitchen floor.
Ma crouched,
barefoot, bare bottomed
over the swept boards,
because that's where Daddy said it'd be best.

I came too fast for the doctor,
bawling as soon as Daddy wiped his hand around
inside my mouth.
To hear Ma tell it,
I hollered myself red the day I was born.
Red's the color I've stayed ever since.

Daddy named me Billie Jo.
He wanted a boy.
Instead,
he got a long-legged girl
with a wide mouth
and cheekbones like bicycle handles.
He got a redheaded, freckle-faced, narrow-hipped girl
with a fondness for apples
and a hunger for playing fierce piano.

From the earliest I can remember
I've been restless in this
little Panhandle shack we call home,
always getting in Ma's way with my
pointy elbows, my fidgety legs.
By the summer I turned nine Daddy had
given up about having a boy.
He tried making me do.
I look just like him,
I can handle myself most everywhere he puts me,
even on the tractor,
though I don't like that much.

Ma tried having other babies.
It never seemed to go right, except with me.
But this morning
Ma let on as how she's expecting again.
Other than the three of us
there's not much family to speak of.
Daddy, the only boy Kelby left
since Grandpa died
from a cancer
that ate up the most of his skin,
and Aunt Ellis,
almost fourteen years older than Daddy
and living in Lubbock,
a ways south of here,
and a whole world apart

to hear Daddy tell it.
And Ma, with only Great-uncle Floyd,
old as ancient Indian bones,
and mean as a rattler,
rotting away in that room down in Dallas.

I'll be nearly fourteen
just like Aunt Ellis was when Daddy was born
by the time this baby comes.

Wonder if Daddy'll get his boy this time?

January 1934

*“Dust piles up like snow
across the prairie...”*

A terrible accident has transformed Billie Jo's life, scarring her inside and out. Her mother is gone. Her father can't talk about it. And the one thing that might make her feel better—playing the piano—is impossible with her wounded hands.

To make matters worse, dust storms are devastating the family farm and all the farms nearby. While others flee from the dust bowl, Billie Jo is left to find peace in the bleak landscape of Oklahoma—and in the surprising landscape of her own heart.

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