

## DUST

## FREE

Most people work hard all their life hoping to find a little time and a little pleasure for their hard labor. The problem is that they already have so many things that they don't even see those things around them which brings pleasure for free to those who take the time to stop and look.

On a sharecropper farm there were very few things to stand between a boy and those things around him free for the taking both the physical and the contemplative.

When the winter is so kind as to lay down a deep blanket of freshly fallen snow that lies motionless on the quiet slumbering land you have but to look out to see the beauty of nature's winter carpet of pale blue under a cold winter moon. Nature's comforter of warmth laid over precious seed and dormant things which await arousal by the loud and thundering spring. Then after viewing the splendor you could stand back and draw pictures in the frost which your breath left on a yellowed window pane.

In the cold morning air a boy can run out to scoop up from the snowdrift a bucket of nature's gift to make with anticipation a tasty dish of Mother's snow ice cream. So much is the bounty that the limit of ice cream is determined only by the amount of sugar, cream, and vanilla, that Mother will allow you to have. Of course you always bring back twice as much snow as she told you to bring hoping she will repent and double her recipe.

(CAUTION to young boys. It never works!)

Firewood is free down in the canyon there is a bountiful supply which you may have for bringing home and piling up high, then you may have a roaring winter fire for all who are within to warm themselves until the spring comes again.

For the boy who is fortunate enough to find an old baby bath tub, there is a treasure of memory in store when he finds a long cow tail covered with snow, he can slide like the lightning through a storm lit sky, and play until exhausted while the whole world goes flying by.

When the air is so cold that it stays in your nose there are number one coon hides to glean from the creek bottoms for the Saint Louis Fur Market. And during the gleaning, there is always the bonus of hearing a well trained Coonhound run that old chicken thief down a cold frozen creek. Quick is the chase and loud is the bawl from the hounds bringing you on to where the free bounty is holding up in a din tree ready to stand for a fight. Life, if he is good enough to whip a real hound, but leather if he is weak and falls to the ground, or left in the tree if he's too young to go one on one with a true-to-the-blood hound!

But best of all, dry winter or snow, was the warm love that was so freely given, the kind of love that comes from the family held closer together by the chill of the cold prairie wind just outside every door and window. At that time, you realize real warmth doesn't all come from the fire roaring in the old wood stove. It comes more genuinely from the old kitchen stove and Mother reading to you by the warm winter fire or from the thickness of a quilt carefully sewn together by

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milking sore hands, the warmth of those hands, and those eyes, warmth that comes not from the hearth, but the heart. Such warmth should be had by all the sons of men.

March arrives with the swift winter wind as the days grow longer in the Western sky, then quickly the South wind arises to challenge the North wind. Throughout the month of March, there is a season of change. Together the winds rage across the flat dusty plain with strong South winds demanding their right to establish the spring, insisting that it's time for the earth to bring forth all living things from beneath the blanket of winter's bleak land. The young into a wonderland upon which they may look with new eyes and the old come out with thanksgiving, because the cold winter is past. All the while these South winds insist with thunder and lightning while they put on an assumed display of nature insisting that the South winds be allowed to pass, then with reluctance the North wind falls back to tarry a little while to wait for strength that will allow them to bluster forth across the prairie again.

Many times I have seen the conflict of wind upon wind and each time I have felt the thrill with the victory of spring. What a mighty display that only the soul can see, feel, or touch, and it's all free. Each time I see the winds struggle so there is that joy in my soul like it's all just for me. While I stand amazed in the eye of a storm.

When the winds have died down to a spring's morning calm and the rains have ceased, the bleak brown of prairie dust has put forth a fresh carpet of green upon which many good things come free. Behind the storm clouds the song birds come to sing, serenading the people on the dust of the plain while wild flowers push up through the hard pasture land spreading their fragrance to everyone for free, while tadpoles go dancing in the pools from spring rain and little people run laughing, chasing butterflies on the wing.

Puppies, chicks, and a thousand wonderful things to touch and see, but the best of all is that they are all free. Birds build nests, the winters kill the past, soon spring blossoms will wither in the summer heat, but from where they fall there will be small fruits that grow to ripen under the hot summer sun, fruit to make dining fare for all God's creatures both great and small. Mulberries for birds or coons, and a thousand creeping things, wild plumbs for jelly or jam, and wild onions for tasty table fare.

Down in the canyons under the summers scorching heat, wild grapes grow plump to make fine jellies both sour and sweet. On a deep green bush with scalloped leaves the wild blue Currant waits to be harvested freely should any one pass by in the need of its sweet tasting meat and seed. And if some small boy should pass by that way and pluck the sweet berries from their woody stems to take them home by buckets full to his mother who is housed within, he is sure to have a hot Currant pie, or come the next cold winters wind a large Currant cobbler with big blue dumplings steaming within. So winter snow, or summer heat, the land gives forth so much for free, all good things from sharecropper land and the best of the bounty was just for me.

Thank you Lord for all these things I have both felt and seen, especially for those wonderful loves that lie still in cemetery gardens on the quiet and dusty plain.

Gary