



GOLD

*Out  
of the  
Dust*



*A Novel*



**KAREN HESSE**

 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*

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