**BITTER STRAWBERRIES** by Sylvia Plath

All morning in the strawberry field  
They talked about the Russians.  
Squatted down between the rows  
We listened.  
We heard the head woman say,  
'Bomb them off the map.'  
Horseflies buzzed, paused and stung.  
And the taste of strawberries  
Turned thick and sour.  
Mary said slowly, 'I've got a fella  
Old enough to go.  
If anything should happen…'  
The sky was high and blue.  
Two children laughed at tag  
In the tall grass,  
Leaping awkward and long-legged  
Across the rutted road.  
The fields were full of bronzed young men  
Hoeing lettuce, weeding celery.  
'The draft is passed,' the woman said.  
'We ought to have bombed them long ago.'  
'Don't,' pleaded the little girl  
With blond braids.  
  
Her blue eyes swam with vague terror.  
She added petishly, 'I can't see why  
You're always talking this way…'  
'Oh, stop worrying, Nelda,'  
Snapped the woman sharply.

She stood up, a thin commanding figure  
In faded dungarees.  
Businesslike she asked us, 'How many quarts?'  
She recorded the total in her notebook,  
And we all turned back to picking.  
  
Kneeling over the rows,  
We reached among the leaves  
With quick practiced hands,  
Cupping the berry protectively before  
Snapping off the stem  
Between thumb and forefinger.