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THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE THREE
FALL 2015



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THE VERNAL POOL ISSUE THREE

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**RUTH BERHANE ELIAS
A MILLION THOUGHTS FOR
MY BELOVED**



THE VERNAL POOL

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A Million Thoughts for My Beloved

Did you know I thought of you a million times?

Did you think of my thoughts existing

a million times today?

There were 20 heartaches

30,000 kisses

40 hugs

and ninety-two hundred searches

soaring like arrows, intent, and hopeful

Did your heart cross thoughts with mine?

Were we intertwined

like golden strands of thrill

shimmering the lonely night?

As my million thoughts roam

I almost feel your thoughts;

your heart pounds with mine...

then come the 50 resolutions.

I resolve and I become
present to the moment

Our prayers thread together the distance
with hope

and here

united and distant

I have my one millionth thought--

Peace

**TONY HUA
SKY'S EDGE**



**THE VERNAL POOL
ISSUE THREE, FALL 2015**

Sky's Edge

On the orbit of the brown planet, a white cylinder drifted. The cylinder had traveled for less than a thousandth of a galactic unit, the distance from one arm of the Galaxy to its center. Each galactic unit was over 15,000 parsecs, each parsec over 150,000 astronomical units, each astronomical unit over 150,000,000 kilometers. If it had been traveling at the speed of light, the little cylinder would have been drifting for half a century. But of course, the cylinder could only travel at a tiny fraction of the speed of the light, a barely conceivable velocity, and so the cylinder had been drifting for over 2000 years.

Thrusters shot out of the cylinder, steadying its descent onto the growing landmass. The onboard computers performed the meticulous calculations of landing 700,000 kilograms of mass against an object several magnitudes larger. A dozen cryo-sleep pods sat against the inner walls of the cylinder, holding the silhouette of its occupants suspended in time. Inside the occupied pods, microscopic machines called nanosurgeons modified internal organs, optimizing basic human physiology for the brown atmosphere and reanimating the body from its cold slumber. The process of cryo-sleep freezes the body, holding the body in the near absolute absence of energy, suspending the natural processes of life. As a result, the body ceases to truly sleep—to dream. This was the cylinder's 84th landing.

Evan Lang stared into the bulkhead above. Being an insomniac, he had always struggled to sleep, but now he found himself struggling to stay awake. As the cryonics technician, he was awoken first to ensure that the process was successful for everyone else and to minimize complications. This was a redundant duty as the ship's automated systems had less than a thousandth percent chance of failure per reanimation.

Taking his first breath in over twenty-five years, Evan re-

laxed, inhaling and exhaling. He was naked and cold.

He thought about Catherine Young, the crew physician and the mother of two beautiful daughters, at six and seven years old. When the cylinder made its first landing, Catherine joked that she would return to find grandchildren waiting. On the second landing, the joke became that she would return as a great-grandmother. Then on the third landing, Catherine became quiet. On the fourth landing, she was a withered corpse slouched over a chair, holding a still pristine photograph of her children. Her cyro-sleep pod was still awaiting its occupant. Evan had been the last person to see her alive, and he had been the first to discover her, twenty-five years later. They buried her along with all her mementos, her photographs, and told themselves that it was what she would have wanted. That was eighty landings ago. Evan has since made it a point to be the last one to rise from the pods.

A loud clang followed by a boisterous voice interrupted his thoughts. Leaning over him, Kurt Hermann, the engineer, was looking down into his pod.

“You awake yet?” asked Kurt, offering his hand, a tattoo of the sun visible on his forearm. “Get dressed. Captain’s waiting.”

Evan stared blankly at Kurt for a moment before reaching for the hand, raising himself out of the pod. They entered the main chamber.

Captain Tanvi Sen was standing atop a crate. She acknowledged Evan and Kurt, then addressed the crew. Her speech was prompt, functional, and to the point—diagnosis reports, fuel and supply rations, planetary conditions. Then she added, “This is the closest yet. Let’s get to work.”

The crew worked efficiently to prepare the cylinder for launch. Men exited the cylinder carrying various machines—drills, pumps, scanners. They filtered water, mined ore, manufactured replacement parts, and synthesized new rations. In a

different time and place, these tasks would have taken weeks, but automation shrunk the tasks to mere hours. Soon they were waiting on the final stages of the resupplying process in which the crew were powerless to work.

The lull became their greatest enemy. It was the lull that allowed for doubt and anxiety, which gave a sense of scale of time and space, which prompted Catherine Young to make jokes.

Kurt sat on his chair, legs resting on a crate used as a makeshift footstool. He was watching televised recordings from the 20th and 21st century, of fiction where humans effortlessly traveled across the stars. When it became apparent in the 25th century that faster than light travel was unfeasible, beyond the scope of man, the appeal shifted away from most, barring a few like Kurt, who continued to hold an unspoiled optimism for the abilities of mankind. Evan sat behind him, resting his head on his hands. His head felt like a bloated tomato.

“This is Ground Control to Major Tom,” sang Kurt. “Can you hear me Major Tom?”

“Yea?” sighed Evan.

“Join me. This is good stuff,” said Kurt. He waited for a response. “Need something to keep us going.”

“I never liked that stuff.”

“Maybe you’d like them now. We don’t have anything else to do.”

“I didn’t like them when they were hundreds of years old, and the last couple thousand years haven’t changed my opinion on the matter.”

“Come on Lang. It’ll make the time pass.”

“This is Major Tom to Ground Control,” responded Evan. “Please, shut up!”

Kurt was silent.

Evan stood up. “I’m sorry.”

He exited the room.

The main chamber was dimly lit. A lamp illuminated a chart in the center of the room, while stacks of boxes laid around the perimeter of the chamber. This was the lowest section of the cylinder, beyond which laid the brown planet.

Tanvi stood over the star chart. She gave him a brief glance, made a note, then looked up. "Did you need something?"

Evan looked at the chart. "How close are we are?"

"Well," began Tanvi. She paused. "Our capsule must make periodic stops. Where and when we make these stops are beyond what we can predict at this moment. But our ship has managed to find where it needs to stop so far. It seems to know where to go."

She resumed her work, making notes, occasionally erasing figures on the already worn paper.

Tanvi was the most senior member present when the cylinder had detached itself from the mining rig stationed on the Kuiper Belt, that last ring of orbital bodies demarcating the Solar System from the rest of space. A catastrophic collision between a stray comet and the mining rig had forced the crew to evacuate. They were not explorers, at least not by intent.

Setting aside her pencil, Tanvi sat on a crate opposite to Evan. "When I was a little girl, I grew up in a city so saturated with lights that the stars never made themselves evident."

"Was that why you signed up for this, to leave Earth and see what lies beyond it?" asked Evan.

"No, that was never a thought. I suppose I had grown up never knowing the sky." She squeezed his shoulder. "I heard that you can get a clear view of the stars tonight. If you look, perhaps on the very edge of the sky, you can find our Sun."

When Evan returned to his station Kurt was absent, and the televised recordings had been switched off. In the silence, he became aware of the metallic austerity of the chamber. He felt as if he was sitting in a tin can, and the idea of returning to his sta-

tion became claustrophobic. Feeling restless, he collected a radio, a canteen of water, and a pistol. This last item, the pistol, he left behind on second thought. It was the only gun onboard the cylinder. When he had exited he was sure that Tanvi had given up work on the star chart, but now he could not recall.

Each step away took Evan further away from the cylinder. He left behind two pairs of dark imprints crossing the dunes. Each imprint was an empty space on the brown sand, a fleeting reminder of something living. The brown planet seemed to be barren of life, a landscape devoid of any sense of beauty or ugliness, indifferent to the lone, bipedal creature that walked across its unremarkable surface. This lonely creature traversed the land until it fell—slipped through a crevice on the brown mass.

Evan clutched his knee, trying to suppress the pain. When the pain subsided, he laid in the darkness, his heart still pounding with adrenaline and his palms slick with sweat. His hands reached for his equipment, but they had been lost on the tumultuous descent.

He began touching the walls, the floor, the small, stone juts scattered throughout and guided himself with them until his hands found the familiar form of the radio, shattered and rendered useless. Exhausted, he laid against the wall to rest.

Evan felt weightless, floating on the planet's orbit; he was no longer on its surface. He did not see any stars, only a great illuminating ring encompassing a void seemingly posed to devour him. As if suddenly awakened from slumber, he stirred about restlessly, helpless but full of intent. He could not turn—could not rotate about the central axis of his body, his limbs flailing about as if he were a madman. Drifting out from under the planet's protective shadow, his right arm became engulfed in sheer light soon followed by his torsal and head. He tried desperately to cover his eyes, but the light passed through his fingers. He felt the uncompromising nature of a star's existence, of the billion

years act of nuclear fusion, now flaying him alive.

Evan awoke, shivering from the cold sweat. A beam of light had pierced the darkness through an opening in the cavern, reflecting off a metallic object, his canteen. He groaned as he attempted to lift his legs, the muscles in his body burning, refusing all but the smallest movements. Reorienting himself, Evan began crawling towards the beam of light.

On reaching the canteen, he drank greedily, droplets of water feeding the ground, when the thought suddenly came to him, and he began laughing. *I am a character in one of Kurt's videos, stranded and looking for a way back to the spaceship.*

The laughter warmed his body. Picking himself up, he crept towards the beam of light as it illuminated the path. He pulled himself through an opening in the ground, surfacing to a blinding light, noon. The cylinder would be launching soon.

He scouted the area, found his trail, and began retracing his steps. He wasn't sure how long the crew would wait for him, if at all, but he knew they were anxious to leave. As the sky darkened, he climbed a ridge overlooking the landing site. His eyes scanned the landscape, looking for the white cylinder against the brown backdrop.

Then as he looked across the horizon, on the edge of the sky, he could see the cylinder. Evan watched the cylinder as it stood in silence, then as it lifted off into the dark sky above, and as it became nothing but a shimmering star, returning home.

**TANAYIAH RACHELLE BRYELS
FREELANCE MUSE:
AN EPISTOLARY POEM**



THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE THREE, FALL 2015

Freelance Muse: An Epistolary Poem

i.

freelance muse in search of a real poet. must be warm-hearted and thoughtful. willingness to write in a second language appreciated. must be musically inclined; there must be jazz in your verse or this will not work. it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. must have apartment with plenty of sunshine & lots of space for flowers. must love to drink. and drink. and drink. must always abide by rule of threes. must know how to write something other than the blower's daughter. if you absolutely have to have a day job, it must be beleaguered school teacher or friendly neighborhood barista, or something equally necessary but taken for granted. if you look up to John Green, this will not work. lanky brooding white boys and ad execs need not apply.

ii.

dear miss muse,

i am writing in response to your incredibly detailed and wildly specific want ad. i believe that i am the perfect poet for you. attached are a few pieces of work that i believe will bring you to agree. however, before we meet, i have a few questions of my own for you.

what qualifies you to be a muse? how ephemeral and sparkling is your beauty, on a scale of one to ten? is your voice more like the tinkling tintinnabulation of a tin wind chime moved to song by a summer breeze, or the rustle of cool fall air ghosting through the grass and waking fallen leaves? how long, in your opinion, could i opine on the opalescent qualities of your wide-open eyes? is your hair more along

the lines of the finest spun gold gleaned from the glowing hoards of the gods? or closer to the softest wool culled from the blackest sheep on the isle of colchis? or perhaps red as the light in a rising sun over a distant fire-cleansed forest, in which i can faintly see my own redemption? frankly, any of these will do. what constellation can be drawn in the freckles of your shoulders? let me know so i can begin composing now. similarly—would you describe your skin as a) the pale coolness of fresh milk in a glass on a crisp monday morning, b) russet-brown and soft like fresh earth sifting through a farmer's fingers, or c) tanned and golden and longing for my touch? if these descriptors are not enough, please do feel free to create one of your own. if you would be so kind as to address these inquiries at your earliest convenience and reply to me, i would be so grateful.

yours,

p.

iii.

dearest p,

i can tell already that you're the right poet for me. but rather than answer your litany of inquiries, i propose we meet. how can you know how you'll be inspired if you don't look your inspiration in the eyes? i appreciate your earnest efforts at sussing my fitness for musing for yourself, but there are some things that cannot be divined over correspondence—the divine being one of them. i invite you to join me this coming wednesday at the small, silent red-walled coffee shop that sits thoughtfully in the shadow of high-rise apartments and khaki-colored corporate offices. we have a lot to talk about.

ever yours,

muse.

iv.

dearest muse,

a few of the poems i wrote after we parted ways yesterday. enjoy.

“fitzgerald eyes”

you must be all eyes

to people who amaze your:

staring eyes, big and brown—

searching, childishly wise.

endless eyes, i feel;

abysmal

perceivably Eckleburgian.

do you mean to stare so—

into me, out of me, through me,

forcing a polite smile and an awkward laugh?

or do you only

mean

to look?

v.

dear p,

i think we're going to get along just fine.

BRENDA CELINA GARCIA
TWO POEMS



THE VERNAL POOL

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Cry When I Am Dead

Crying one afternoon the reason
I can't remember,
must have not been important;
my mother hugged me and said
don't cry, cry when I'm dead.

Her usual way of letting me know
everything had a solution;
except death and even then
life has to go on.

Later that month
I saw my mother crying,
I asked her what was wrong.
She couldn't explain.
She just felt depressed.
Trying to comfort her sorrow
I told her *don't cry, cry when I am dead.*
She locked her eyes on my words.

Syllables pulling her heartstrings.

She sobbed

as if I had invited her

to my own funeral. As if I had shown her

my chosen casket

along with hanging marigolds.

I offered a hug and she locked me so tight I could

feel her reading my heartbeat.

Do you know that there is no name

for a mother who had lost their child?

I won't cry when you're dead,

I will be buried with you.

My Scars

Pan sizzles danger
as blazing oil pops little crisps of heat.

No tengas miedo.

My mom tells me not to be afraid
as I hide behind the counter.

She travels the kitchen
with such ease

dominating the mad oil
and patiently waiting
for the enchiladas to fry.

Cowardly I try to learn,
but a drop of oil pierces my skin
and I dash behind the counter. She laughs.

Como vas a cocinarle a tu esposo?

How are you going to cook for your husband?

My jaw clenches
and I can feel the humidity of the stove.
She is joking. My frustration is not,
as flashbacks of generations
of women serving flicker

like the blue flames reaching out of the sizzling pan.

Trying to determine the winning words to spill

I remain silent.

She tells me to learn for my own good.

I stare at the tiny red blister on my arm

then at my mother

wondering how many oil scars she has.

Looking at her exhausted eyes

like mirrors documenting her late nights

waiting for my father

to arrive, wanting approval for her homemade meal,

mopping and dusting

the specks of tradition back into place.

I swallow my voice

and let her continue the lesson;

she has more scars than I.

The oil burns,

but oil burns won't be my scars.

My scars will be paper cuts.

My scars will be pen marks.

And my scars will be

burning verses.

DENISE WIJESOORIYA
THE LIFE OF A COCONUT



THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE TWO, FALL 2015

The Life of a Coconut

1.

When I was in first grade, I thought my last name had been spelled wrong.

My name just didn't feel right. Too long, too many letters, too hard to pronounce. Teachers looked at it like it was a puzzle. And because names define people,

I felt like the enigma.

2.

"Gimme a free slurpee!"

a boy in my class yelled

as I walked past him.

I was seven or eight.

True, my father and I

went to 7-Eleven

almost every week

after school, and the

cashier appreciated
my dad speaking in
the language of lions.
Yes, he would give us
free things.
Mostly bags of chips
close to expiration.
Never free slurpees;
they were only discounted.

3.

“What accent do your parents have?”

a girl in my class asked me one day.

I stared at her.

“My parents don’t have an accent.”

I was ten.

“Yes they do.”

That night, I listened:

To my mom chatter on the phone as she cooked curry in
the kitchen.

To my dad's running commentary on the Laker's game.

That was an accent?

I had thought it was something all adults had.

After all, many of my classmates had parents
with accented voices as well.

But then I recalled, years before

when we went to Puerto Rico and St. Martin
on vacation.

Someone asked my parents where they were from.

Sri Lanka was on the tips of their tongues, yet

I came forward,

gesturing between my brother and me,

"They're Sri Lankan, but we're American."

4.

When I go out, strangers
speak Spanish to me.

It's not their fault.

Where I live,
people assume anyone with
tan skin,
brown eyes,
dark hair,
is Latino.

“Ignorant,” my dad might say,
and my mom might scrunch her face.

Anyone too dark
is African-American.

Just as guests assume
my father is
when he takes their bags as a bellman.

Anyone too light
is Filipino.

Which is what people think
my mother is
like many of her fellow office workers.

Where I live,
you fall into one of
these three categories
when you aren't white.

Call myself Indian,
people think Native American.
Call myself Asian,
people think East, not South.

I try to just flat out say
I'm Sri Lankan, yet
I get mixed reviews:
There is the small, small
group who knows and nods.
There is the majority, who
look confused and ask.

Then there was the one person,
who said, “You’re shitting me,
is that a land like Narnia?”

I might as well belong to
a fictional land.

5.

“Sri Lanka? I’ve never heard of it. An island below India? That’s
so exotic!”

What does exotic mean?

Lush rainforests, tropical temperature, snake charmers, and
elephants roaming?

Or does it mean a group of people so small and insignificant to
you that you can provide no other adjective than a dismissive,
back-handed compliment you don’t really understand.

Is that exotic?

6.

I remember looking up to Victoria's Secret models as the epitome of American beauty. As a young girl I'd stare at the banners of perfect, scantily clad women as my mom pulled me by the hand through the bustle of the mall to get her shopping done.

When I finally got old enough to shop there myself, I learned something while buying my first set of bras from Victoria's Secret Pink. Looking at the white little tag near the fastener, I read small, pink script which said, "Made in Sri Lanka."

At first I felt so proud. "The country of my ancestors, my heritage, has a hand in creating one of the biggest ideals in America! Maybe I'm closer to being an ideal myself than I think!" But when I realized that the small, pink print that says "Made in Sri Lanka" is the only real representation Sri Lanka had with Victoria's Secret, I began to look at their thin, fair models with scorn.

The fair complexion ideal which persists around the world is something I'm only starting to fully understand now. But that doesn't mean that it didn't affect me earlier.

I'm attracted to white guys. It's no wonder why.

I used to think it was it because I was raised in America. Growing up, watching and reading love stories with handsome white

heroes like Emmett Richmond and pretty white heroines like Elle Woods. Becoming enamored with the idea of a wholesome, American husband. Eyes drawn to lighter skin, lighter eyes, lighter hair.

I used to think it was genetic. Maybe I'm like my great-grandfather on my mother's side, who married a British woman, my great-grandmother, golden hair and green eyes. Perhaps I'm like my cousin on my father's side. He got married in Minnesota to his fiancé, petite and pretty with blonde hair and blue eyes.

I wonder what their kids will look like. I wonder if mine will look similar. Mixed kids more often than not tend to be gorgeous. A small part of me hopes that the British genes buried deep in my DNA might show through, so my kids will look even whiter than just half. I wonder what my parents would think if they knew.

Mostly I wonder what my father will think, when he inevitably walks me down the aisle, and doesn't see a Sri Lankan man waiting for me by the altar.

**JULIAN HIGHSMITH
STARS IN THE SKY**



THE VERNAL POOL

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Stars in the Sky

The two of us gazed out into the cosmic depths,
Searching for truth and understanding,
but what we found was much more than that.

We found two hopeful visionaries.

Looking up into the night sky, the stars seemed so far away,
but when I looked into your eyes, I realized they were closer
than I thought.

As we lay there, stars began to fall from the sky, sprinkling their
warmth and light.

I closed my eyes and made a wish, basking in their ethereal
glow.

Our worlds gravitated to one another, until they collided,
leaving behind a trail of stardust.

Your smile radiated, illuminating the night sky.

Your soul a star, shining brightly through all,
enlightening the path, for the debut of a nova.

Lying there, I admired you like a constellation
pondering how such wonder came to be.

As time passed and the stars shifted slowly,

I grasped your hand tightly to feel your pulse,

wanting to remember the magic under the stars,
knowing that you were a little piece of heaven.
We drifted off into the darkness hand in hand,
like comets waltzing through the hazy heavens.

MICHELLE M DOWNER
SHELTER



THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE THREE, FALL 2015

Shelter

The earth shocks the sky
as I watch the lightning from our back porch.
Rain pools at my collarbone,
my hair still wet from my shower.
Mother says I'll catch a cold;
it chases me each night into my blankets,
its clammy embrace too weak for their warmth.
Tonight the trees pound their chests in camaraderie,
eager spectators of the violent electricity,
and the cold sneaks feverish fingers
onto my forehead as the battle above
arrests my attention. Shivers are sent
through my bones like the light
to the wanting welkin. Brother defends me,
says he will protect me from the cold
that wraps itself beneath the threads
with which he buries my shoulders
just as we do in the summer in the sand.
Waves crash through the grass, their air
sending green skyscrapers swooning,
shrinking in the wake of the wrangling.
A bullet loosed in silence, the gunshot comes
in miles counted Mississippi.
One,
two,
three—
thunder strikes and I'm out. The chase over,
the fight only beginning, I am called to bed.
I don't see enough bruises

beyond the clouds, my eyes desire to see
the charged blood drip in currents, but mother says,
that's enough. She tucks me in with shaking hands
as the war outside illuminates my curtains,
her smile whimpering as she wishes me sweet dreams.
There is violence enough in this house.

ADAIR SYN GEARY
THE FIELD OF CATS OR
CATS AFTER LOVECRAFT



THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE THREE, FALL 2015

The Field of Cats or Cats After Lovecraft

“Nature is full of such illusions to impress the imaginative.”

-- H.P. Lovecraft

The crossroads nearby
are charcoal strings strewn
around the Field of Cats.

Hiss, it is a crack in the blinds,
to peer into somewhere.
The mangy cats cry
and scratch at our doors.
Close the windows or be
forced to hear
feral praying to some
mischievous cat god.

Hoot, beak, toes
form *something*
on the shingles
of the roof.

Hooting
might as well be
a bright star
sleeping beyond clouds.
This pudgy dove chirps.
In the sunlight,
it's possible to glean
that the eyes in

the overgrown meadow
belong to the hungry
cats.

No one complains about
the Field of Cats.

Do we fear
the same fate
as the couple in Ulthar,
that fabled
Lovecraft
village?

**BIANCA MICHELLE LINDSAY
NEGRETE
TWO POEMS**



THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE THREE, FALL 2015

Burned-Up Zombies

--inspired by Jennifer Knox's *Hot Ass Poem*.

Look at all these burned-up zombies everywhere, the grass is full of burned-up zombies and look at my dad, he's one burned-up zombie sitting over there with the weed killer bottle trying to figure out how to make the weeds burned-up zombies too, and look at those weeds, they sure aren't burned-up zombies like everything else around here and with my dad's burned-up zombie gardening skills those weeds will never be burned-up zombies like him, and the grass and just look at that weed killer bottle he's trying to open it's like from the 80's, man, that's one burned-up zombie of a bottle, just look at that sticker on the front of it, it says: "Kill Those Weeds and Bring Your Grass Back to Life!", man, that is one burned-up zombie thing to say, just look at my dad and that bottle sitting on the porch together with their burned-up zombie selves, man, those are some burned-up zombies, my dad wants my baseball mitt, man, what a burned-up zombie thing of him to say, I don't wanna give him my mitt, he's gonna turn it into a burned-up zombie too, everything he touches turns to burned-up zombies, he's like Midas, he's got the magic touch, but instead of turning everything into gold he turns everything into burned-up zombies, aw man, look at that, my dad just got burned-up zombie juice from that burned-up zombie weed killer bottle all over my not-a-burned-up-zombie mitt, man, now my mitt's a burned-up zombie. I'm going inside before he touches me and I turn into a burned-up zombie too.

Semillas

-- in honor of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa,
Rest in Power.

Like trees, our skins
rose from the ground,
kissed the sky,
and marched forward.

Trataron enterrarnos,

They tried to bury us
skin-deep,
in our own soil.
They thought it was
nothing
but dirt.

Pero no sabían que éramos,

But they did not know
that in our own soil
we would grow
like skin
and like trees.
They did not know
that we were

Semillas.

MAYRA CARILLO
THE FIELDS



THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE THREE, FALL 2015

The Fields

Contrary to popular opinion, there is nothing romantic about working in the fields. I tell you this because my dad convinced me that picking vegetables in the heat of a California summer was the way we would come of age. He painted it so brilliantly in my mind, told me it was what my ancestors did, what my family did, that I felt a sense of duty and I went.

The first time I ever worked in the fields, I braved the triple-digit weather to pick chilis – Serranos and Jalapeños. You are constantly bent over the plants, the dirt getting under your fingernails and into your nose. I remember getting dust in my eyes and making the mistake of rubbing it out with my spiced-up hands.

And I hated it. I hated it because everyone in that field was better and faster than me because, at \$2.25 a bucket, they had to be. I hated it because I did not owe my ancestors anything and I did not need to be there. But still I stayed.

Every morning, my dad would drop my two younger brothers and me off and tell us he'd pick us up at the end of the work day. They'd play around for a while, taking frequent breaks, but not me. No. It was a competition and I could not afford to lose. My skin was just as brown as the other workers' so I was just as strong. I had to be or risk looking like the kid with papers who doesn't need to work.

And I hated it because, even though my skin got darker from the sun and my hands slowly became more dexterous, I would still only make one bucket to their three. I hated it

because I felt that my ancestors were watching me from their mountains in the sky, shaking their heads in disappointment.

They lied. There is nothing poetic about working in the fields. There is only hard work, obligation, sweat, and tired backs. There is only the need to feed your family and your feet moving down the row as fast as you can. There is only the sun and your calloused hands. Your ancestors be damned.

