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The Vernal Pool

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The Fields

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THE FIELDS



THE VERNAL POOL

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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.