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Nursing Water

To work in the muddy trenches of a corn field is kind of crazy. The weather beats down on everything and everyone showing no remorse. In the morning the long rows of agriculture are a bright green, dripping with condensation. The soil beams with life. Insects, spider webs, dragonflies and worms. The corn stalks stand tall and shrouding, the rising sun bouncing off the thick leaves blinding me. With each step through the maze-like purgatory my feet become heavy, my breathing became slower. The dew on the leaves caresses my body again and again till I'm drenched, cold, and helpless. The strenuous task of pulling out the thick, sticky tassel from the middle of each stalk leaves my hands caked and bloodstained. I would only have two breaks. A thirty minute break for lunch and one fifteen minute break for rest. It would be a ten hour shift at a mere seven seventy-five and hour.

I had fallen behind from the group. I was restless and could hear faint voices in the distance. I picked up my pace afraid of being left behind, the deafening snap of the tassel as I yanked it out the stalk silenced all my thoughts. I trudged on until I reached the clearing at the end of the row. The sudden break in the field only amped up my weariness, I collapsed on the ground. "You should try and keep up with the group." My team leader Herald said in a husky

voice. He stretched out his frail white hand and hoisted me off the ground. I stared at my own hands, slowly opening and closing them while I winced at the pain. I pulled my ragged shirt off, the change in movement racking my body with agony. Herald's blonde, short hair stuck to his forehead only making his tall slender body appear even more obsolete. He began to walk towards the break camp. "Hey, you going to take a break or what, you've missed your fifteen and lunch three days in a row?" "I'm good, I need the extra money man." I wondered if my nonchalant tone of a voice was meant to convince Herald or myself that I was fine. "Suit yourself," he shrugged and continued toward the camp.

I had done the math in my head several times. At seven seventy-five an hour, for fifteen consecutive days, each being a ten hour shift I would come out at a handsome eleven hundred, sixty two dollars and fifty cents. With having forty five minutes of break time unused in addition to the ten hour post, I would accumulate an extra eighty five dollars. I needed every last dime if I ever was going to be behind the wheel of my own car. When it comes to saving money I'm very frivolous. This job provided a fifteen day pay period, the work ending when the fifteen days came to a close. One fat paycheck, no scraping a little icing off the top here and there and compromising my daily luxuries in the name of responsibility. I was coming up on day four and I felt confident that I could finish the work without breaks.

The rest of the group emerged from the camp looking refreshed, full, and happy. There were still four hours left for today. I pulled my water bottle from my waist belt sloshing it around. I only had a few chugs left. I glared at the canteen gulping. My mouth was dry and with

every swallow a bigger lump seemed to form in the back of my throat. I could have ravaged the water bottles remains without a second thought. My hand trembled and then closed hard around the water bottle. I thrust it into my waist belt. “In about an hour or two,” I said to myself out loud. I wanted to pace the water and was sure I could resist for a little while longer.

Dawn had passed and the relentless sun scorched everything. I walked back into the field. The heat had dried up the earth, the ground picked up dust and coated my boots as I walked. The luscious green tint on the leaves was now a placid mint. The thick leaves were unforgiving as their harsh edges sliced every exposed portion of my uncovered flesh. I began wishing I was an insect. All the small creatures from the morning had found some hidden pocket of shade to hide in. A low hanging bough or a soft burrow of dirt. The loud thud of every step reverberated in my ears. My head throbbed slowly like the bang of a meat pounder on raw beef. Row after row each one even narrower than the last. Sweat poured into my eyes blurring my vision. Black spots formed and erased the putrid mint color. Slowly I sat down in the dirt, my breath coming in rapid spurts. I reached for my canteen but my clammy hands wouldn't allow me to grip the cold steel. It rolled into a ditch a few rows over. My heart rate sped up with each gasp for air. I clutched my hand over my heart. “Help, help me please.” My attempted cry sounded like the whisper of a chain smoker. I continued anyway until the exhaustion took me and I passed out.

I woke up in the clearing by the break camp lying flat on my back, the sun was all I saw. Soon Herald's image began to form and the bucket of ice water he held looked as if it were flying towards me in slow motion. The cold water splash hurled me off my back, I sat in an upright position coughing madly. A swift slap came at my back again and again until the coughing

ended. “I’m so thirsty,” were the only words that came to my mind. Herald unscrewed the cap on my water bottle and handed it to me. The water ran down the sides off my mouth as I devoured it. The sweet liquid coursed through my body feeling me up with each breath. The deep haze I’d been in all day gradually collapsed. “More,” I said heavily. “That’s enough for now,” Herald responded. “You’re dehydrated, too much too soon could worsen your condition. The EMTs are on their way. Can you walk?” I got up slowly and stumbled, only managing a limp with Herald’s support.

The effects of dehydration were staggering, I spent the next two weeks in bed. Solids were hard to keep down and everything I drank cramped my stomach. The countless runs to the bathroom made me wonder if I’d contracted dysentery. I sat in my room staring menacingly out the window regretting waiting on those few gulps from my water bottle. This summer there would be no shiny new car. Having only worked four and a half days, I hadn’t even managed to scrape up enough money to buy a decent pair of headphones. I spent my last days of summer nursing water bottles. I had a new found respect for water and a better understanding of my own limitations.

