

2020 MCC Creative Writing Contest

First Place - Creative Non-Fiction Category

"A Day for Her" by Kyah Fischer

"It's time to wake up Dia", Ashley softly whispered as she flickered her little sister's bedroom light. "Dia we are going to be late for school". School started at 7:00am which meant the girls had 45 minutes to get ready for the day. Dia rubbed both of her eyelids with the back of her hands, forcing them open. Slowly getting dressed, one arm and one leg at time, Dia lacked self motivation for the day. Ashley quickly poured two bowls of Lucky Charms cereal for the two of them to eat before their long day. Minutes turned into seconds and the girls rushed out of the door. The fuzzy seats were warm from the morning sun shining down on the beat up 1990 Accord, welcoming them to sit down. School was just around the corner, so enjoying the naturally heated seats was bittersweet. "Bye Dia, see you at work. Love you!" Ashley yelled as Dia ran up to the large brick building. The next facility over was Ashley's highschool, making their mornings quick and easy. Get up, get dressed, eat, drop off and arrive.

As much as Ashley wanted to graduate from highschool, it was very difficult to juggle education and a full time job. Ashley was the breadwinner of her family, who brought home the money for her, her mother and sister to survive. Ashley's mother, Melissa was always anxious as she had a reason to be. Melissa was not a citizen of the United States, which made deportation a constant worry for the entire household. Melissa was not employed, leaving it up to her 17 year old and 12 year old daughters to make money for the home. If Melissa was deported, the girls would be living alone in the boarding house they currently resided in. On the central coast of California poverty levels were high. Many families all boarded together, including Ashley's. Her family lived on a small floor of a home that resided 12 other families.

The school day quickly passed, meaning the work day was approaching even faster. 3:00pm came around and the school bell rang. Ashley and Dia both bolted to the car, scurrying to make it to work on time. They drove out of city, passing house after house identical to theirs. Eventually the buildings and houses began to disappear, as the girls inside the Accord made their way down highway 215 south towards Kenny's Strawberry Farm. Once driving down the highway for 15 minutes, the girls approached thousands of acres of strawberry fields. The sandy brown foot trails between the green bushes were filled with local immigrants, picking the strawberries one by one. Pulling up to the entrance, Ashley parked next to a group of identical buses which transported most immigrants from local boarding houses or trailer parks to the farm. Nearly 60% of workers in agriculture are illegal immigrants. If you are not a citizen, you cannot obtain a drivers license. But that doesn't mean the state of California won't hire you, because crops such as this one provide transportation. They need illegal immigrants to work for them just as bad as the immigrants need to work.

Dia stepped out of the car and walked over to the large white van that had the back hatch open. Inside the hatch were brown burlap sacks, rope, boxes, and plastic containers to hold the strawberries. "Ashely, will you come help me please?" Dia asked, as Ashley finished tying her running shoes. Ashley helped Dia string the rope into each belt loop, then into a loop on the

burlap sack so it could hang on her hip. She then filled a box with strawberry containers for Dia to carry with her. Ashley quickly readied herself as she did Dia, so the two of them could trek out together into the green bushy fields. For six long hours, young Dia worked in the fields. She was one of 450,000 children in the US who wouldn't return home in time for dinner due to her late shift. Ashley would be working even longer, until 5:00am. All day she would be in the fields with Dia, picking strawberries off the bushes alongside other workers. When the sun sunk below the horizon, the children went home. Though Ashley was only 17, the company saw her fit to work the night shift, sifting through the frozen strawberries and picking off all of the ice.

12 year old Dia rode the bus back home, alone. Ashley stayed at the farm to continue working into the night, as Dia would return home, eat some dinner and go to bed. While Ashley was at the warehouse, she stood in line with the other workers in front of a conveyor belt that moved strawberry containers along, less ice in each one. "My hands are freezing," Ashley said to the dark haired women next to her. She didn't respond, but Ashley was not offended. All day everyday the workers were silent. Not once did Ashley witness a fight, criminal action, let alone a civil conversation between any of the immigrants. *They seem sad*, she thought.

Finally, the hands on the clock ticked to 5:00am and Ashley rushed out the door. When she got into the Accord and slammed the door, she blasted the warm air. Even though it was a warm 75 degrees outside, her fingers were numb from the crushed ice pieces stuck to the berries. Once she regained feeling back in her hands, she began the 25 minute drive home. By the time she got home it was 5:30am; an hour to sleep. In one hour, Ashley would rise, wake up Dia, get her dressed, make them breakfast, go to school and go to work all over again. This is how life as a young hispanic girl, having no choice other than to work long hours, for too little pay, looks like. Did the strawberry company kidnap her and force her to work for them? No. Melissa's inability to become a citizen and chance of being deported leaves Ashley and Dia with no other choice than to work wherever they can get hired, accepting any wage. Though no one is forcing her, it is not voluntary, making this another case of exploitation of child labor.