



A Different Day

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Abstract

Violet is a young woman navigating a complex and confusing world. Her family works together in the fields and early one morning Violet finds herself in a complicated situation as she encounters a young man she only knows peripherally. As she strikes up a dialogue with her new friend, she discovers growing up isn't as easy she once thought it was.

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Introduction

“Thoughts are slow and deep and golden in the morning.” -John Steinbeck

The engine of the truck rumbled as it came to a stop at a light and slowly began moving again. Violet pushed her hair away from her face and looked out the fogged glass. *It's like that movie she saw once, when visiting relatives in California. Something about a groundhog. Every day was the same. She couldn't remember how that movie ended. Did he ever have a different day? Would she?* Violet sighed, prompting her mom, who was in the seat in front of her, to turn around and say softly, “Se que es temprano.” It wasn't even that early, despite it being dark and somewhat chilly for a June summer day.

The truck was getting warm as the temperature increased outside. They were almost to the fields. Typically, Violet and her family started the season north of their house and worked their way back south, so at the end of the season, they were at one of the fields closer to where they lived. When they lived in Albuquerque, they started inward and worked their way to the outskirts. None of this made sense to Violet. She figured if she really wanted to ask, she could. She just never did.

She looked over at her brother next to her. He liked being called Eddie, even though his name was Eduardo. He said it was just easier. Violet wasn't sure who it was easier for. He never elaborated; she never asked. One year older than her, her brother didn't seem to mind the early mornings. He was sleeping, with his earphones in. Not the fancy kind some kids had, but a much less expensive brand their parents tried to convince them last Christmas, was “pretty much the same.” *They weren't*, thought Violet.

One of the kids at school made sure to tell them that, on the bus to school several months earlier. “Hey, those are the cheap kind,” called one of the white kids who rode the bus with them to school. Eduardo didn't look up. *Why did anyone care*, Violet thought, *headphones are headphones*. And it's not like anyone at their small school had much anyway. Plenty of white people even worked in the fields here, which was not the case in other places they had lived. When Violet's father decided they were going to move to the small town of La Luz, Violet had immediately wondered, “*What kind of place was named “the light?”*” Violet had just finished middle school. That was an entire year ago, and she didn't feel any



different about La Luz than when her dad first told them they were going to live closer to both her Tias, her dad's younger sisters. "You can see your cousins every day, if you want!" Instead of the twice yearly visits they endured before moving. The cousin closer to her in age, Catalina, now wanted to be called Cat.

"Like the animal?" Violet asked her.

"Yeah, like the animal," Cat said, rolling her eyes.

I guess she thought the name was easier, too. She was six months older than Violet and didn't let her forget it. Violet's mom warned her about copying Cat's eye rolling habit she seemed to have just developed, according to her Tia Ana. Eddie shifted in his seat. He could sleep anywhere, anytime. Last spring, he had slept almost the entire way to La Luz from Albuquerque, even though it was already light out when they left their two-bedroom rental and climbed into the pickup they used for everything. All of their belongings were crammed in the bed of the truck. No real furniture, though. Violet's Tias all had odds and ends that they were going to bring over, including a small couch, a kitchen table and a small dresser for Violet. The rest they could pick up from the nearby Walmart.

In the truck on this morning, Violet played word games on her phone, wanting to text her two best friends she was not too happy about leaving behind in Albuquerque. Not that she was given a choice. She was, after all, only fourteen. *At what age, do you start getting a choice?* She knew it was pointless to ask. She swiped at her phone. *I would text Yesy or Martha but not this early in the morning.*

Starting early was the only way to pick cherries. Either you picked early and finished early, or you didn't bother working the season at all. Everyone, it would seem, became a morning person during cherry season. You had no choice. She would wait for her first break, which she never really took anyway. She would spend a few minutes texting, look around for where her parents or Eduardo might be and then go back to work. Her mom checked on her at least once during their shift, if not more. Violet knew why she did it but didn't think it was necessary. No one bothered her; no one even talked to her. She worked quietly and quickly, only looking up when someone called her name, and it was usually a relative of some kind, waving enthusiastically.

Violet didn't hate cherries; she could even still eat them, unlike her mom who exclaimed anytime they saw cherries outside of work, "Tenido suficiente de esos, gracias!" But she did hate how repetitive her days were. She knew it could be worse. She worked steadily throughout last summer and was able to pocket most of her pay. She knew from some of her friends that this wasn't always the case. One of her classmates, Sam, told her he wished he could keep his wages because he turned most of it over to his parents. Violet knew her parents could use the extra help but would never ask her to do that.

She wondered if Cat would be working today. She worked last summer but spent most of her work time "crushing" on David the son of her Tia Ana's best friend, Sandra, who lived nearby. He was 16, drove his own car and worked completely on his own, without any parental supervision. His mom worked at the local *tienda* in town. When she asked Cat why he didn't just work there, in the refrigerated aisles with the already picked fruits and vegetables, four blocks from



their neighborhood, she said exasperatedly, “Because, *dummy*, he can make more money here than he can there, and you know Al pays him under the table here.”

Al, the orchard manager, didn’t pay Violet or her family, “under the table”, but she knew some of the workers were paid that way. All the workers talked to one another and Violet would overhear her parents discussing it on the way to and from work. She did ask once, what the phrase meant and they told her to basically, hush. “No te preocupes” her mom said, without even turning around. So, Violet didn’t push the subject.

David was tall enough; she didn’t know when she started noticing taller boys, but she knew she wasn’t the only one taking notice. Her friend Yesy, always seemed to know the boys at school’s heights, telling her, “Carlos is nearly *six feet tall*, in the hallway after Geometry.

“One of my uncles is six feet tall,” Violet told Yesy.

“It’s really not that tall.” Yesy replied, “Well, it is to me! The tallest male in my family is not even *five eight!*” Yesy was nice enough, but a little easy to impress. But as her abuela said *la gente le gusta lo que les gusta* (*people like what they like*). And Yesy liked tall boys, like Carlos and David.

Violet sighed; they were pulling into the adjacent lot from the orchard. Eduardo sat up and yawned, pulling out his headphones and rubbing his face. “Looks like it’s going to be hot,” said Violet’s dad. They walked to the bin pick up area where they would clock in. The light was peeking through the mountains. La Luz was a pretty town, at least in the early morning hours. It was just now a little before five o’clock. They would work until around 1pm, which seemed like such a long time from now.

One of the managers pointed to where he wanted them to start. Violet hurried alongside her parents. Her parents had worked in agriculture since they were in elementary school. They didn’t even get to middle school. Her mom finished the sixth grade but her dad stopped going to school after fifth grade. They were both hard workers, but Violet wondered, *at what price?*

She hooked her bin on and walked to the area she had been directed to begin picking. She could see Eduardo a little ways away, with his headphones back in. They were told not to wear headphones but some people did anyway. *Who was going to say anything?* The managers rarely walked between the cherries.

Violet considered herself to be a decent picker, not as fast as some but good enough for someone her age and size. She didn’t really need a ladder, and anyhow, for some reason Al only had the males use the ladders. Violet’s friend Martha would say that was a classic example of sexism. Violet didn’t care enough to say anything.

She worked steadily as the sun came up. She filled two bins, tossing them into the trucks as they passed by. When she was smaller, she needed help to toss the contents of the bins. Now, she could handle it all on her own. The next thing she knew, she could feel someone was working close to her. She looked up and saw it was David, her cousin Cat’s crush.



“Hi,” David said, waving to her from a short distance.

“Oh...hey,” Violet stammered, “I didn’t see you.”

“It’s fine; you seemed deep in thought.”

“Not really, just kind of tired.”

“Yeah me, too. I don’t think I’ll ever get used to being up this early.”

“Oh, have you not been working for very long?”

“Oh, I’ve been working since I was 7 or 8, probably,” David said, “I just can’t get used to waking up this early. I couldn’t fall asleep until after 10.”

Violet’s family was really good at getting to bed early in the summer, often climbing into bed when it was still light out.

“You should try to go to bed earlier,” Violet suggested, not knowing what else to say to him. This was by far the longest conversation they had ever had.

“Yeah, I should try that,” David, nodding in agreement.

“Hey, where is your cousin?” David asked.

“Cat?” Violet asked, then immediately thought, *obviously he meant Cat*.

“Yeah, doesn’t she work here?”

“She does, she just doesn’t work today, I guess,” Violet said, realizing she didn’t really know Cat’s work schedule. She could barely keep up with her own work schedule. She just got into the truck in the mornings and arrived at the orchards, like a robot in the movies Eduardo loved to watch.

“She might come later,” Violet said, “but I don’t really know.

David just nodded. “You don’t...really look that much alike,” David remarked.

“Yeah...I guess not really.”

Violet was shorter, fair skinned with lighter hair, taking after her dad’s side of the family. Cat was taller, with broader shoulders, with dark hair and eyes, resembling her own father. Cat was, as another one of her cousins once referred to her as, *unico en su clase*. Violet blended in, looking like her Tias. Violet’s dad remarked just the other day that Violet was



beginning to look just like her Tia Luisa. Violet didn't mind that. But she did envy Cat's deep brown eyes that always seemed to be searching. Maybe she was searching for tall boys, like Yesy.

"Isn't that your brother?" David motioning over to Eduardo as he began to pick on the same side as them.

"Yeah."

David and Eduardo were the same age but didn't run in the same friend circle. David seemed older than Eduardo, more independent, driving to work on his own.

"That's kinda cool your whole family works together," David said.

"Yeah, I guess so," Violet answered. "Doesn't your mom work at Shop and Save? Why don't you work there?"

Violet already knew why but didn't know what else to say.

"Uh-huh, my mom has worked there for years. I just kind of wanted to do my own thing. She's cool and all, but I would just rather come out here and work, at least in the summers. I work there during the year, after school."

"Guess that makes sense." They fell silent, rhythmically picking and tossing.

David wiped his brow and asked Violet, "What do you like to do for fun? Do you play any sports or instruments?"

Violet did not. She ran track in the spring, enjoying the sound of her breathing and running shoes hitting the track. Unlike Cat, who played both volleyball and basketball.

"Not really, I just moved here," Violet answered, even though they had been in La Luz over a year.

"Ah, well, maybe you'll find something you like."

David was a lot nicer and more mature than most of the boys Violet knew; boys who seemed to just want to crack jokes and talk about sports. Caleb, one of the smartest boys in her grade, was one of the only other boys Violet could even have a conversation with. Cat thought Caleb should be Violet's boyfriend, but Violet wasn't even sure how couples formed at her school. They mostly talked about things they watched; they liked a lot of the same shows and movies on Netflix.

Violet only had access to the streaming service thanks to her friend's Martha's willingness to share her login with her. Martha and her sisters all shared one login but so far it hadn't been an issue. Martha's oldest sister attended the University of New Mexico, had an on-campus job in the tutoring center and was easily able to afford the per month cost.



Caleb didn't have to have a job and as soon as he turned 16, would get his older brother's car to drive around. Caleb's parents were the owners of Shop and Save, one of the only grocery stores in La Luz. Caleb was already talking about what college he wanted to go to, and he wasn't going to be attending one of the instate colleges.

No, his parents had recently signed him up for a college visit to UCLA. Violet had only been to California once, when she was much younger to visit her mother's Tia, who had long since passed. She lived in a town outside Bakersfield. The name escaped her at the moment. Her arms were beginning to hurt. She put them down at her sides and breathed in deeply.

David looked over at her, "Break time?"

"No...not quite yet," Violet answered.

Cat was going to be so envious when she hears how talkative David was being with me! Cat had once told Violet that David was "a man of few words." But he didn't seem to be, at least not this early summer morning. Maybe a little reserved, but not quiet. *What was the difference*, Violet wondered.

David stopped picking and pulled out some gum from his back pocket.

"¿Querés chicle?" he asked with a faint grin.

"Sure," said Violet, taking a piece, mostly to be polite. She would have to spit it out later, or else her mom would surely say she reminded her of *la vaca*, as she always did when Violet or Eduardo chewed gum.

"So, what do you think of 'the Luz'? My mom said you used to live in the city?" "The city" was how most people in their town referred to Albuquerque.

"It's okay, a little small. I like the BBQs." Violet offered.

She enjoyed the small, yellowish house they moved into, on the same street of two of her Tias. The whole neighborhood knew one another. They "grilled out" most weekends and some weekday evenings. Someone would grill *carne asada* while others would bring arroz, frijoles and different salsas. Violet's favorite salsa was the mango habanero salsa one of the neighbors made. She said the secret was in the kind of habaneros she used. It was sweet, with a kick to it after she swallowed, feeling like a little flame in her throat. Violet liked these types of get togethers. Most weekends in Albuquerque they would eat indoors and didn't socialize with many people in the neighborhood.

"Yeah, our little 'hood sure knows how to eat!" David chuckled. "Hey, if you want, maybe we could do something one of these evenings, see a movie, get some food?"

There it was. David was asking to hang out with her! Violet slowly turned and looked at David. He was still picking while he waited for her to answer.



“Oh, uh...well, I,” Violet stammered. “I can’t really date until I’m at least sixteen,” *maybe older*, Violet thought.

“Oh, I kind of assumed you were sixteen. That’s cool.” David seemed unfazed.

Maybe this was typical for him? Violet had never even so much as held hands with a boy. But she knew other girls were already doing much, much more. One of Violet’s cousins, Raquel, had gotten pregnant at sixteen. It was as if someone had died when everyone found out. The adults spoke in hushed voices, and in stilted phrases like, “How could she,” and “what will she do.” In the end, she did what most girls her age and background did: she had the baby.

Now the baby, Talia, was three and just about the cutest baby Violet had ever seen. She even babysat from time to time. The father disappeared soon afterwards, back to Mexico according to her parents. Violet’s parents didn’t even have to warn her. Their eyes said it all, *do not let that happen to you*. And Violet had no plans to.

David spoke again, “Well, maybe we could do something as a group, you me, some of the guys I hang out with, Cat.” He stopped picking and looked over at her. “Would your parents go for that?”

Violet answered honestly, “I don’t know. I’ve never asked. The only boys I hang out with are my cousins.” Violet immediately regretted it. *Why would she say that?*

“I have two sisters, both younger, so I totally get it,” David shared. Violet smiled and looked up. Her mom was walking towards her.

“Mija, es hora del almuerzo,” her mom said. Violet always wondered, why they called a meal so early in the morning, lunch, when in school they ate lunch at noon. I guess it was more the order of the meals, and not the time of the day. They had already eaten their breakfast, when they got up, moving slowly through the dark house. Her mom had made oatmeal, oatmeal with fruit.

David waved to Violet’s mom, “Buenas dias, Doña Laura.”

Violet’s mom said hello back and helped Violet remove her bin. As they walked down the rows of cherry trees, Violet could see both Eduardo and her father getting ready to join them. They didn’t have long, about 20 minutes. Her mother had packed beverages and sandwiches for them. They usually ate, in silence, in the truck and then finished up the rest of the workday. Today, though, her mom had questions for her, wanting to know who David was.

“Remember, he’s Tia Ana’s best friend Sandra’s son? He lives down the street.”

Violet’s mom clicked her tongue, remembering, “Si, si.”

Violet’s dad spoke next, “He seems like a hard worker.”



Although Violet's dad stopped going to school earlier than Violet's mom, he spoke pretty good English. Eduardo already had his headphones in and was watching a sports game on his phone. Violet nodded, even though she knew he couldn't see her.

Violet cleared her throat nervously, "Uh, he actually...he asked if I wanted to get food or watch a movie sometime." She spoke quickly, not bothering to say it in Spanish for her mom's sake. Violet's dad did it for her and her mom turned to look at her. She didn't say anything, just looked at her. *Oh, great, she's already picturing me with a Talia of my own,* Violet thought.

When Violet's mom spoke, it came out slowly, "Si, es solo una pelicula....?" Violet nodded.

Violet's dad spoke again, "We do know him and if it's just there and back, I don't see a problem. Unless, you don't want to go?"

He looked at Violet in the rearview mirror. She blushed.

"I mean, I guess I could go. I do like movies," she said, thinking of how often she and Caleb talked about movies at school. Violet straightened up.

"Anyway, he mentioned it being more of a group activity than a..." She trailed off.

"A date?" Eduardo spoke up, despite his headphones being in. "Are you and David going on a date?"

"No, I said, it *wasn't* a date. Mind your own business," Violet said, pushing his arm like she used to do on long road trips, when he crossed over to "her side."

Violet thought of all the much bigger families she knew. She didn't know how road trips worked with so many kids. Eduardo snickered and went back to his phone. "Well, time's up, let's go," Violet's dad said. Violet's mom smiled and put her hand out for Violet's trash. They threw their trash into a bag which they would toss into the nearby garbage can. They crossed the dusty lot that served as parking for most of the workers. Many workers carpooled or came from surrounding communities via a bus.

As they resumed work, Violet felt...different. Giddy, even. Sort of like when she woke up on her birthday and knew her mom had made her favorite *tres leches* cake. Violet put her bin back on and started picking. A few minutes went by and she heard her name being called. She looked up, surprised to see her cousin Cat standing there. She had her bin on; it was already half filled.

"Hi!" Cat exclaimed as she waved Violet over. David was standing on the other side of her.

"How was lunch?" Violet quickly said it was fine.



She got in line alongside David and Cat.

They were quiet for a minute and then Cat asked, “So, what movie do you want to see?” Violet froze.

David glanced over at Violet and answered, “Oh, you know, whatever.”

“Maybe something funny? I could use a funny movie,” said Cat. “Hey, Violet, do you want to come to the movies tomorrow night? David and I are gonna go later tonight.”

Violet thought, *well, I guess my parents can relax*. There would be no date. She wasn’t sure if there had ever been one.

She turned to Cat and shrugged. “I don’t know, I told Raquel I would babysit Talia,” Violet lied.

Cat squealed, “Oh, she is so cute! Well, maybe another time.”

“Yeah, maybe another time,” said Violet. She concentrated on what she was doing, and the rest of the morning passed uneventfully, with Cat keeping up a steady stream of chit chat. Violet had to hand it to her; she *was* easy to be around. She could talk to anyone, about anything.

Once it got close to one in the afternoon, Violet finished the section she was on and announced, “Well, time for me to quit. I’ll see you around,” pulling up on her bin.

Cat glanced over, “Okay, I just started this bin, so I will see you later. I drove in with Cesar.” Cesar was Cat’s older brother.

“Wait up, I’m all done,” David, hurrying over to Violet and said to Cat, “Text me and we can decide on that movie.”

He turned and asked Violet, “Listas?” She nodded and they started walking.

“Hey, I, um, didn’t mean to make that weird.”

“What?” Violet asked.

“You know, I asked you if you wanted to see a movie and then you said you couldn’t and then Cat showed up and we started talking about movies and she said she really wanted to go see one so... I guess I kind of invited her.” His words were jumbled, tripping on one another on their way out. Violet shrugged. Was he apologizing or just explaining?

“Oh, it’s fine. I asked my parents during lunch and they said maybe next year,” Violet said apologetically.

“Oh. Well then, there you go.” David smiled. Did she detect disappointment? They reached the clock out area and took turns clocking out. A line was forming behind them. Violet stood off to the side while she waited for her family to finish



clocking out. David waved goodbye and started towards his truck. Violet watched him walk away, looking at his phone. She sighed.

The day had started off exactly the same as any other morning. Violet thought to herself, *but today was a different day*. She laughed to herself. She felt bad about lying to David. Her parents had already said it was fine for her to go to the movies with a boy. She wondered what Caleb was doing this weekend. Her parents and brother were walking towards her. *Maybe I'll text him on the way home*, Violet thought. She hoped he would be happy to hear from her.

THE END