

## The Field Men

by Abigail Herrera

Mamá says, night time on the field is when we're the safest. I never believed her until I saw my brother, Antonio, disappear in broad daylight four years ago. We were the only children left on the farm, the others had either died from the brutal heat or had been taken by the Field Men.

Abuelo had told Antonio and I the stories of the Field Men when we had just moved to the farm.

"The Field Men are tall, pale creatures," he told us, "who prey on children left defenseless in the fields. They hide in the crops, watch you as you pick the produce, and wait for the perfect moment to snatch you and they insert the soul into your body."

"Have you ever seen a Field Man, Abuelo?" I asked, curiously.

"No, but I've heard one. It had a roar so powerful, it shook the farm."

"I'm never leaving my bed again."

"No mijita," Mamá said, "The Field Men hunt in the day."

"They never hunt alone." Abuelo added, "So never leave each other's side when working, never stay too far away from your parents, and always stay low to the ground. If you go above the vines, they'll spot you a lot quicker."

His story stuck with me for years, I always followed his warnings. Antonio, on the other hand, thought it was just another story.

"No way that stuff's real, Maya." He joked as we were picking grapes in the brutal August heat.

"Well I believe it, Señora Duarte said her son was taken by the Field Men a few months ago!" I told him.

"Señora Duarte is a crazy *viejita*, just like Abuelo."

“Abuelo isn’t crazy, Antonio!”

“Oh yeah?” He stands, “Let’s see about that.”

“What are you doing?”

“If the Field Men aren’t real, you’ll do my chores for the rest of the week.”

“But if they *are* real, they’ll kill you!” I yelled. He laughed at me and stood on his tip-toes to see over the grape vines. “Antonio stop being stupid!”

Antonio jumped up, “See, they’re not real!” He kept jumping, “HEY FIELD MEN, COME AND GET ME!”

I heard a faint rustling in the distance. I looked around, no one.

“Okay you made your point, now stop messing around!”

“I’M A LONELY TWELVE YEAR OLD BOY OUT IN THE OPEN! COME TAKE ME AW--

” A thunderous roar was heard from the vines, followed by Antonio’s screaming, “MAYA!”

I fell onto my back as I saw him being dragged into the bushes, “ANTONIO!” I yelled back. I tried moving but I felt paralyzed by fear.

“HELP ME!”

Then, he was gone. His screaming stopped. The rustling. Stopped. I couldn’t save him. My brother was gone. He belonged to the Field Men now.

That was years ago. I’m sixteen now, and tonight is the anniversary of Antonio's disappearance. I haven’t been able to work in the fields alone since he’s been missing, Mamá and Papá say helping Señora Duarte with the washing is better for me. She’s a quiet and frail woman who has been living in her hut alone since her son disappeared. He would’ve been in his early twenties now. I guess the Field Men don’t just prey on children.

The sun was beginning to set. Mamá, Papá, and I came together in front of our little house and lit candles for Antonio. Papá says a prayer, he prays Antonio is at peace in heaven with God and Abuelo. Mamá prays that he watches over us as we work and I ask that he, and God, forgive me for not saving him that day. It is something I have asked every night since.

We let the candles burn throughout the night, I watch the flames die out as my parents fall asleep. I look out into the grape fields and close my eyes. Antonio's screams echo in my mind, my chest tightens.

"Maya..." I hear. I turn around. No one. I put on my *chanclas* and walk out the front door. I inhale the summer air, trying to calm myself. "Why didn't you save me?" I hear.

"Antonio?" I whisper to myself as I skim over the vineyard. I hear footsteps in the distance. I grab a pair of shears laying next to my feet and hold them up as the footsteps grow louder.

"Maya..." I hear again, and soon a figure is made clear in the light. Señora Duarte comes hobbling over to me.

"He's here, my son! I saw him!" she tells me with a smile on her face.

"Emilio?" she nods, "Señora he's gon—"

"He's with Antonio."

My body becomes frozen, I look towards her hut. A creature that resembles Emilio stares into my soul. I turn to look at Señora Duarte, "I don't think that's..." her body then begins to shake and she grows another three feet, now resembling the same creature as Emilio only now with a more familiar face.

"Why didn't you save me, Maya?" she says in Antonio's young voice. "Why did you let them take me?"

His eyes resemble black holes, he's thinner than I remember. I take a step back but the creature puts his hands around my neck. Suddenly I'm lifted a few feet above the ground, dropping my shears. I struggle for air and kick my legs. "S-stop!" I managed to say. The creature drops me. I cough, unable to scream for help.

"Now you must join us." he says, pinning me to the ground with his foot. He looks out to the grape vines. A roar is heard. "No..." I say under my breath.

The rustling begins and a Field Man comes running towards me. I'm helpless. I scream but he roars once more before turning into dust. I look back at Antonio before the creature forces himself down my throat. I can't scream, everything goes dark.

Mamá was wrong. Night is just as dangerous as day.