

LACC Writing Contest (E.S.L.)

Short story 1st place

Title : How the Usual Became Unusual

Entrant : Margarit Kharzaryan

How the Usual Turned Unusual

It is a usual summer day, early in the morning. The whole neighborhood is on its feet. Do they want to wake up early in the morning? I don't think so.

The summer is very hot in my town. Even at night the city doesn't cool down after the burning heat, and most of the time there are mosquito swarm attacks, too. But in the early morning there is a very cool breeze that keeps the mosquitos away. At exactly this time everybody wants to sleep. But they have a lot to do. If they sleep a little longer, the heat will attack, and no one will be able to finish their jobs.

Even though I live in the city, a lot of households there have land, some small animals and birds—especially chickens. The families love to eat fresh organic eggs, and... that means that the neighborhood's morning starts with the roosters' concert. It makes even the kids get on their feet, and their early morning routine starts on the land in the backyard. It's unimaginable how many varieties of vegetables, greens, berry bushes and fruit trees grow in this ordinary land. It looks like a competition between neighbors.

And in one of these households lives a small, curious, mischievous, wild girl, who is impossible not to notice. She's wild because she reminds me of Mowgli. Her curly hair covers her face. But under her hair you can see her curious shiny eyes that look like they are searching for something. They are always ready for mischief.

During these days, people in the neighborhood didn't have drinking water in their houses. They walked hundreds of meters carrying buckets to get water. In the new bucket they keep the drinking water. In the old, wrinkly bucket they keep the water they use to wash themselves. The curly haired girl's mother asks the little one to wash her face, but she refuses. So the mother forcefully washes her face and tries to comb her hair, but has no luck there. Her hair almost never gets combed because it is so curly like a spiral. But sometimes after a bath, with a lot of screaming and tears the combing gets done. The mother gives the curly hair girl and her sister eggs and greens wrapped in flat bread for breakfast and walks off toward her backyard. The kids don't bother to sit. They eat their wraps on their feet.

In the backyard the father is giving some kind of order to the mother. It looks like she isn't doing her job properly. Because it's on the hillside, the land has four levels. On the first level on the south side, the fence is covered with blackberry bushes and the bottom with strawberries. On the bushes you can see the flowers, green, light red, and ripe berries at the same time. Tomatoes grow on this level too. With a spade, the father sometimes closes the waterway with dirt and sometimes opens it so all the tomatoes can get enough water. On the third level grows eggplants, okras, and green beans wrapped over the sticks, and on the corners grow red mulberry and pomegranate trees. Apple, peach, and pear trees are on the fourth level. Under the trees are cucumbers and bell peppers. The land is divided into two even sides, east and west. All those goods grow on the west side. On the east side from top to bottom grow grape vines. Between them is the sidewalk. And its edges are covered with yellow daisies, purple morning glories, and pink

roses. It's a different kind of rose with small petals. From those petals they make rose syrup.

On the second level there are two apricot trees, cherries, and figs. The apricots are ripe already and some of them have fallen to the ground. The mother calls the little ones to collect them. She's doing her chores on this level today. There are five evenly made meadows where basil, parsley, cilantro, dill, and scallions grow, and here and there, some mint. Almost all of the purple basil has a golden spiral ring over them. That is a kind of weed, and the mother has to clean the basil of them one by one.

During their chores the kids secretly ate a few apricots. I forgot to mention that they are two and a half and three and a half years, and they are not allowed to eat apricots--not because they are dirty, but because some of them have worms and there are a lot of worm eggs inside. When you bite one of these, you feel as if your mouth is full of sand, and you know right away that you have a wormy one. The kids walked so many rounds from the tree to the mother carrying apricots and throwing them on the ground again next to the mom.

She then tells her girls to take the weeds to the sidewalk and put them under the sun. This is the only way to kill the weeds; otherwise they will grow back again. They unwillingly start moving the weeds now. The family spends probably four hours on the land. The sun is high up already, and the mother picks some vegetables and greens, takes some apricots from the ground and puts them in an aluminum bowl. Her kids follow her to the house. On the patio, the father gives the woman some new orders and tells her that he is going to take a nap. He almost always takes a nap in the house for an hour, or an

hour and a half, but today he has decided to do that outside, and he has a favorite place for it: fifteen minutes away from home where the government vineyard is.

The vineyard is surrounded by a cement ditch filled with water. It's so long that you can't see where it starts and where it ends. It's pretty deep and the bottom is covered with green, slippery moss. Alongside there are beautiful willow trees. The legend says that the willow tree was a young, beautiful lady who was in love. Once she waited for her lover all day next to the water, but he didn't show up. So she cried and cried and became a beautiful willow tree. Under the willow tree beside the ditch is the father's favorite place to take a nap.

He took the girls with him, carrying one of them on his shoulders and the other one in his arms. He jumped three times over the ditch because of the girls. He fitted himself into a comfortable spot and asked the girls to stay next to him. After five minutes he was in a deep sleep.

In the middle of the green grass there are a lot of different colors of wild flowers with insects flying from one flower to another. The girls pursue them with their eyes. And then a butterfly comes and sits on a violet colored flower, which is next to the ditch. The girls look at each other, smile, say something, and make their move. When they get to the flower, the butterfly is already gone. So the younger one decides to pick the violet flower. She pulls the flower so hard that it comes out with the roots and she falls into the ditch and is carried away by the water. The older sister runs back to the father and says something. But he doesn't show any sign that he has heard her. So she starts pulling his arm. He's kind of mad, and he opens his eyes, but he can't understand what is going on. Then he realizes what happened and using his inertial strength starts running along the

ditch. He runs and at the same time prays that he will find her alive. After seven minutes of running he spots something under a low bridge. He runs faster than ever before. And there she is, stacked on a pile of dry willow branches under the bridge. Pulling her out of the water, the father is numb for a while. The curly-haired girl's arms and legs are scratched and bloody, and her dress is ripped. But she puts a crafty smile on her face and says that she closed her mouth very tight so as not to swallow the dirty water and says that she saw goldfish under the water.

The news spread very fast in the neighborhood. Neighbors gathered this mischievous girl home to express their amazement that she didn't drown and they confirmed that she really had closed her mouth very tight. Then with a smile on their faces they asked her again and again about the goldfish.