

## CITRUS HILLS

The first time I saw one of our rivers act like a river was when my buddy Chuck Shearn, in the summer of 1980, took me fishing on the east side along a stretch of the Kings far enough upstream that the snowmelt rified over big boulders and knocked you off your feet if you got heedless. A ways down, the flow answered wholly to agriculture and the water became something else. Here it belonged only to the Kings. Spending an afternoon in its full presence, I didn't catch a thing except for a memory: The road was crooked past Centerville, where Mark Twain's nephew, a journalist grown tired of words, once tried to start a water war by blowing up a rival's brush-and-rock dam. Had Chuck and I ventured a little farther east, we would have come upon a gap in the two hills that separated Reedley from Sanger, two rivals in high school football, and landed in the thermal belt, where citrus groves were stitched into hillsides.

I once heard that more millionaires per capita lived in Exeter, the small east side town that belonged to the Emperor grape before it belonged to the navel orange, than any other place in America. I puzzled over how that was possible until I came to understand that 40 acres of oranges and lemons could send four kids to college and 80 acres of oranges and lemons, if the citrus crop failed in Florida, could make a man believe he was rich, and 160 acres could actually turn him into one of those millionaires in Exeter. On the west side, 160 acres was hardly enough to bury a man. And so the east side had its own economy of scale, where farms stayed small, and the children of the white growers went to school with the children of the Mexican farmworkers, and they built communities as close to the agrarian ideal as any in the valley. It

helped that three rivers, the Kings, Kaweah and Tule, ran through the land, and the waters of the San Joaquin came in on the haunches of the federal canal. Even so, when drought struck around, the east side was no more immune from hard times than the riverless west side.

The citrus belt sits above the valley floor on a ledge of granite that can hold only so much snowmelt. By gravity, most of the runoff flows down the slope and filters through the east side and settles in the center valley, thirty miles away. The aquifer's depth on the east side is so shallow—maybe eighty feet before a well driller strikes granite—that only a small quantity of water can be stored in its crevices. The pockets of water that exist inside the rock have become so depleted that some growers are lucky to extract one hundred gallons a minute with their pumps. Water that sat at twenty feet deep before the drought now sits at sixty feet deep. Sand Creek, for one, has been nothing but sand for the past three years. To reduce an orchard's thirst, some growers have pruned back their trees so severely that from roadside they appear to be straws. Others have ripped out their orchards altogether, replacing old trees with baby trees that drink a lot less water, at least for the time being.



Citrus groves along the San Joaquin Valley's east side

I've landed on a knoll the other side of Curtis Mountain, which is really a mountain, where the Munn family has been growing citrus since 1912. That was the year Stanley Munn rode up with a gang of blond, square-jawed young men from Pasadena, sons of bankers, and transplanted the Southern California orange culture into the ground of Tulare County. They dug into hard mineral earth to find water, and found it at ten feet deep. They trucked in baby navels from the Teague Nursery, down near Los Angeles. They dropped sticks of Hercules dynamite into the hardpan to blow open enough earth to plant each tree. They mined sand from Sand Creek to fabricate their concrete irrigation pipes. They built sheds with no interior walls to live in and grow enough oats and grain to raise their Berkshire hogs. They waited four years for the trees to hang their first oranges and packed the fruit with Sunkist, which had followed in their tracks.

The photos of that conquering have been laid out on the coffee table in front of me by Reed Munn, born and raised in this citrus belt, who's proud to say that the water his father fed to those trees is the same water he's drunk all his life. As snowmelt percolates down the Sierra and through the rocks in his hillside, it's picks up minerals and other stuff that he credits for giving the Munn family tree a jolt. "I'm six foot two," he tells me. "That's three inches taller than my father was. And I'm going on ninety-five years."

He's a handsome man with a full head of gray hair and blue eyes he took from his Scottish side. He can't explain how a native Californian came to talk in a Missouri drawl, other than he must have picked it up from neighbor kids when he was impressionable. To keep his memory intact, he splashes a little red wine into his daily glass of Pomm juice before his wife, Ann, died a few years ago, he was able to fit into his wedding tux to celebrate their anniversary. They met at the University of California at Davis before the Second World War and raised three boys and two girls, who graduated from UC Davis, too. His second son, Dana, who's sitting on one side of him, runs the Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District, one of the contractors of Friant-Kern water. His youngest son, Andrew, who's sitting on the other side, farms the forty acres at the bottom of the knoll and another forty acres a field away on the downslope of Curtis Mountain. Reed Munn has eight grandchildren and not one is a farmer. Among them are an actress in New York, a

farmer in Connecticut, a biomedical engineer, a microbrewer, a high school teacher and a civil engineer. "You're looking at the last of the farming Munn's," says Andrew, who at six foot five is Exhibit A for the wonders of the local water.

In a century scarred by seven droughts, the Munn's have never lost a single citrus tree to thirst, though they've come close. One dry year, he'd had to walk buckets of water upslope to keep the alkali from poisoning the roots. Most years, though, he's been able to depend on the cracks in the earth to capture enough snowmelt to keep his aquifer going. The pumps drawing up that water cease only when they die from the centrifugal era to the turbine era, he lines the driveway leading up to his redwood house with every spent pump. It's kind of a monument to the fallen. As another one goes kaput, he adds it to the memorial. The good pumps served him fifteen years. The oldest one, a jack pump, goes back to his father's time. Even in the worst drought, the jack pump was able to pull up water. In wet years, its nose for water tended to get it drowned. That was when the centrifugal pump came in handy. It moved a lot of water when the water was easy to fetch. The later turbine pumps didn't care if the water table was low or high; they kept working.

Reed considers himself lucky because a lot of growers along the citrus belt don't have groundwater to call on. They've got surface water from the Central Valley Project and nothing else. Son Andrew has the luxury of mixing fresh snowmelt from the San Joaquin River with the silver water from the ground. The blend is easier on the trees. It also means less pumping, which lets the water table recharge in wetter years.

"There's a CVP turnout right where you drove in," Reed says. "No water has come out of it for two years. There's some politics involved in denying the east side that water. But there's some miscalculation on our part to add to the hurt."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"So much of this citrus belt doesn't have groundwater. It's never had any get federal water from the canal."

"You mean your neighbors?"

He nods. He doesn't want to come off sounding superior, because he considers the entire hillside, his family's eighty acres included, to



be more or else an experiment, a gamble against the odds of drought, freeze and pestilence. "That's where it's going to come in rough for them this year. They've got the trees but no water."

"This is even worse than 1976," Dana says. "We're not built for dry on dry on dry. Another dry year and this will be the Cadillac desert." Reed Munn can understand his father, Stanley, wanting to plant oranges a century ago on the easy hills that rolled out to the Sierra. It was one of the more gorgeous spots in all California, a huddle of knolls green in spring and bleached in summer where the only crop had been wheat thrown out as seed and dry-farmed. Stanley Munn, a child of Omaha, had wandered all over the country before arriving in Pasadena in 1909 to visit an aunt. In every direction, he could see emerald orchards painted gold with oranges. Here was the mythical Southern California Eden. Every Washington navel kissed by the sun was incomparably fat and juicy and traced its lineage to a couple of trees planted in the early 1870s by Eliza Tibbets, a settler of the Riverside Colony. She was a remarkable woman, an abolitionist and spiritualist from back east who had married three times and divorced twice, adopted a black child and marched with Frederick Douglass for a woman's right to vote before migrating to California with her newest husband, Luther. The Riverside Colony was, among other experiments, a farm looking to grow unique varieties of grains and citrus. Eliza had a friend in Washington, D.C., who ran the test gardens for the USDA and was growing a variety of orange discovered in Brazil. He sent a few of its cuttings out to California, and Eliza was able to keep them alive by irrigating with dishwater. She and Luther sold more cuttings to other growers for a dollar apiece, one year reaping twenty grand before Luther's eternal fights with neighbors over water consumed their fortune.

The couple died penniless even as the clones of their Washington navels planted tens of thousands of acres across Southern California, created the marketing machine called Sunkist, lured trainloads of East Coast émigrés dreaming of another kind of gold, and ensconced a new class of gentility, in their fine suits and gowns, who earned four times the income of the average American. Millionaires' Row in Pasadena wasn't named Orange Grove Boulevard for nothing. Mansions were set amid perfect lines of citrus with the San Gabriel Mountains as backdrop and a couple of palm trees thrown in for good measure.

his became the picture postcard that sold California to the world—the Golden State's "bourgeois utopia," in the words of historian Kevin Starr. Stanley Munn was sent to Tulare County by clever businessmen in Pasadena who were looking to relocate that postcard image to Exeter and Orange Cove, Porterville and Strathmore. They knew already that the future of Los Angeles lay in paving over its orchards. The San Joaquin Valley did not furnish the soft ocean breezes and mild Mediterranean climate that made the Southern California orange second to none. But the Sierra did form a "thermal belt" like the one created by the San Gabriels to buffer against freeze, and three rivers and a half dozen creeks ran down the mountain and through the east side. More important, a culture of men and women who knew how to wrest crops from the alkali had already planted their heels in the ground. A pioneer named James William Center Pogue had been growing oranges and lemons since 1877 on the knoll outside the nearby town of Lemon Cove. By 1905, local citrus growers had dug a ditch and built a packinghouse next to the railroad and were selling their fruit as part of the Lemon One Association. "The four businessmen from Pasadena were named Ock Kiehl, Hurrell and Dickey. Coy was my dad's uncle by marriage," Red says. "They bought the Curtis Mountain Land and Cattle Company, which took in the mountain and a mile beyond it."

Their intention was to cover the hillside in oranges. They sent their sons and nephews to do the dirty work. Where soil ran salty and the aquifer thin, they planted olives as a backup crop. Some years the olives brought home more money than the citrus. Dozens of families came out from Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee and grabbed their own forty acres on the hillside and plain below. When the Great Depression struck, they had no money to drill deeper wells. They just folded up and left the trees to wither. "It was tough ground. You only had so much groundwater," Reed says. "I wouldn't call it a land swindle exactly. A gamble, I'd say. These were people who were used to rainwater to raise their crops. They didn't realize until they were in too deep that California was a different animal."

The sky closed up in the early 1920s. Half the hillside turned barren. Dry farmers came in and planted grain again. The Munns survived because they had groundwater. Still, the price for oranges dropped so deeply that Stanley Munn couldn't cover his packing charges. If he was







world away to find root in a small plot on his fifty-acre ranch up the hillside. The fruit, which looks like a large, bumpy lemon to those who don't know better, matures through summer and is ready to pick by August, a few weeks away. The harvest is as close to grabbing dollar bills off trees as a farmer can get, though Kirkpatrick isn't inclined to boast about it. The eighty-six-year-old Presbyterian, the nation's sole citron grower, is a modest man. And he's been sworn to secrecy by "the rabbis in New Jersey," as he affectionately calls his partners.

No fruit is more venerated by Orthodox Jews than the citron, known in Hebrew as the *ethrog*. Bronze coins from the Jewish uprising against Rome in the first century were embossed with an image of the tree. The globe during Sukkoth, the feast that comes on the heels of Yom Kippur and marks the desert wandering of the Exodus. The million and a half citrons sold around the world aren't cherished for their flavor. In fact, they're rarely ever eaten. The fruit is one of the four species—along with the date palm's frond and the branches of the myrtle and willow—held in the hand and shaken in the air on each morning of the festival. The *ethrog* represents the "heart of man," and as a symbol of faith, repentance, healing and redemption, that heart must be free of any blemish or it never makes it out of the field.

From winter to summer, the fruit is fussed over by rabbis and other experts of kosher law dispatched to the orchards of Israel, Italy and Morocco. Kirkpatrick's three-acre plot on the outskirts of Exeter—soon to be a five-acre plot—is visited four times a year by one or another bearded man from back east draped in woolen prayer shawls. Eight out of ten of his citrons never pass muster. If Kirkpatrick or his son, Greg, don't see the blemish and cast aside the fruit, the rabbis will. Imperfection can be as tiny as a flyspeck. Of the twenty thousand pieces of fruit Kirkpatrick will box and send to market—a dozen wooden pallets—the beautiful ones with stems intact can fetch up to eighty dollars apiece. Once, and only once, he was graced with a specimen so perfect, at a moment of perfect demand, that it sold for two thousand dollars. "It's a load of diamonds," Kirkpatrick says outside the cold storage room ornamented by Hebrew scripture where this year's haul will soon come to chill. The old citrus farmer in his fedora and Levi's can see the math going through my head. In a good year, the multiplication works out to



John Kirkpatrick checks for flaws in his prized citrons.

more than a million dollars. Too bad it doesn't land in his bank account that way, he says. No fruit in the citrus belt, no fruit in the entire valley, for that matter, costs more to nurture. "Maybe only raising my children cost me more," he says.

He's not sure how, back in 1980, Yisroel Weisberger, an eighteen-year-old yeshiva student from Brooklyn, got his phone number. Weisberger was tired of buying imported *ethrogs* for twenty and thirty dollars apiece. His plan was to grow citrons in California and sell better fruit for less money in New York. If he mailed out a packet of rabbinically blessed seeds from Israel would Kirkpatrick consider planting them? "Sure, it sounds intriguing," the farmer said. Weisberger warned him that the citron was not an easy fruit to grow according to Orthodox Jewish standards. Kirkpatrick, a sturdy man with a wry wit, thought he had seen just about everything there was to see in farming. He'd been growing oranges and olives since he was eleven years old, the year his big brother went off to the Second World War. He had raised tomatoes, avocados, squash, freestone peaches and a dozen varieties of citrus, drawing his water straight from the Kaweah River by virtue of what farmers call pre-1914 irrigation rights, which essentially meant he owned a piece of the river. The citron, however, turned out to be an exercise in a particular kind of patience.

He cleared a plot of land where he'd been growing avocados and



planted the seeds Weisberger sent him—seeds that traced back to ancient China. Eighty baby citrons sprouted. He watched them grow, though he wasn't sure what they were growing into. Tree or bush? They were covered with nasty thorns, and their branches had to be stretched and splayed onto a lattice. A rabbi drove up from Los Angeles with his seventy-two-page guidebook to show Kirkpatrick how. The lattice, the rabbi explained, was designed to keep the limbs from lashing out in a fit of wind and cutting nicks into the fruit's skin—blemishes that would not go unnoticed. A year later, when the bushes set their first fruit, Kirkpatrick wanted to celebrate with a harvest. He found himself strapped by kosher dictates. He couldn't sell a single piece of fruit, at least not to anyone celebrating Sukkot. By rabbinical law, the citron had to come from wood that was at least three years old.

After that third year, Kirkpatrick formed a joint venture with Weisberger and his brother-in-law. He would grow the citrons, and they'd sell them at a premium. To protect the fruit, he built a retractable shading out of wood, metal and cloth to minimize the harshest rays of sunshine and ward off winter frost. For almost forty years now, they've been partners. One year, 1999, the trees took the brunt of a big freeze and literally burned to the ground. He had to wait until the following spring for the bush to push up green again. It then took another year for the fruit to return. "Thank goodness the three-year law doesn't apply to trees coming back from frost or we would have had to throw that crop away," he says.

The citron harvest is as fussy as harvests get. He and his son, Greg, along with one farmland, Jesus Serrano, a Seventh-Day Adventist who's been with him for thirty-eight years, are the only ones trusted to select the perfect specimens: twice the size of an egg, narrow at the top and broad at the bottom, bumpy but not grotesquely so. They don't yank the citrons off the limb. They gingerly snip them off, taking care to keep the stem intact and place each one into its own cushioned holder in a box. This way, the sixteen citrons in each box never get close enough to scar each other. He'll watch, a pained expression on his face, as the Orthodox grader makes one final call inside the cold storage room. "Almost anything the good eye can see qualifies as a blemish," he says. "A tiny scarring from a bug called thrips or a blister." It softens the blow a bit to know that the culls will be sent to a craft distiller in Alameda,

<sup>9</sup> George Spirits, where Kirkpatrick's citrons will infuse a high-end rolla.

Across from the cold storage room, the oldest citrus packing line still operating in Tulare County rests between harvests. Built in the 1930s, it once served the groves of Riverside and then followed the orange over the Tehachapi Mountains to Lindcove, where Kirkpatrick discovered it gathering rust in a warehouse "like an old Cadillac." Its belts and rollers pack two bins of fruit an hour compared to the big modern machines that pack fifty bins. It couldn't fit his philosophy better: keep things simple and small. He produces a steady stream of fruit throughout the year—lemons and citrons, pomegranates, tangelos and three varieties of mandarins. Fruit that ships well, he sells through Sunkist. Fruit that doesn't ship well but tastes like sugar, he sends to farmers' markets. He's forever toying with the mix, pulling out old varieties, planting new hybrids, seeing if he can catch the market at peak price. In the seventy-five years he's been growing citrus, he has never seen a lemon market like this one. From November to May, every lemon he picks puts forty cents into his pocket. "The beat goes on. Once we send off the citrons, it'll be pomegranates and then mandarins. No rest for the wicked."

I first met Kirkpatrick fifteen years ago at a book reading in Exeter. As I got to know him over the years, he struck me as a different breed of grower. His middle-of-the-road politics was refreshing to find in a place whose KKK roots still kept blacks out of Visalia. He didn't whine when his crop went south. Not even a freeze made him sour. He was a genuine family farmer who was living out a life on the soil that would have made the old Grangers proud. His wife, Shirley, grew up in west side farm country, and he brought her to the east side when they married, fifty-eight years ago. Even in harvest's frenzy, they'd sneak off and grab lunch together. "She's a partner in everything I do," he once told me. "Every decision we make here, we make together." Two of their children had careers that took them to other parts of California. Greg, the eldest, stayed and farmed with his parents and became a city counsellman who dared to talk about sprawl and how the real estate developers were corrupting Visalia's general plan and paving over farmland. As the drought dug in and the feeds cut off water to the west side and the east side, I checked in with the Kirkpatriks to find out how the cit-



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rus belt was faring. Then I came up with the idea of taking a drive along the paved bank of the Friant-Kern Canal to glimpse drought's distress. I called up John wondering if he knew an easy way past the canal gates a buddy of his. He called back to say that his friend would open the gate and guide us down. "I told him you wanted to do some fishing," John said, snickering.

Were only a few minutes into our drive, the foothills straight ahead and the Sierra just beyond, when he hits the brakes on his Ford Explorer and pulls over to the side of the road. Out my window is a vast open field studded with abandoned wells and their little wooden pump houses beaten by a hundred years of weather. I can't see the St. John's or Kaweah Rivers, but John says they're close by. This is the ground that in a previous century brought about a war between the citrus growers on the hill and alfalfa growers on the plain. "You're looking at the Great Swamp that the Tulare Irrigation District and the Lindsay-Strathmore Irrigation District went to dynamite over," he says. He's shaking his head at the thought that men would fight for forty years, in and out of court, to possess such a forlorn spit of earth and at the audacity of the water mining that took place here. "They made peace only because they knew the Central Valley Project was coming. I hate to imagine all the water that got pumped out of here. It's dry as hell now."

By the time we reach the main gate of the Friant-Kern Canal, the ditch tender is waiting for us. The canal is not even two-thirds full, he says. If the molecules of water could tell their age, most would date their arrival to a snowfall four or five years ago. This being another "zero delivery" year, the canal has ceased to function as a giver of irrigation. It's nothing more than downstream storage to help out the dam. The quiet and still are not an illusion. The water is scarcely moving at all. In a wet year, the canal delivers 1.7 million acre-feet. In a dry year such as this one, it will be lucky to deliver 60,000 acre-feet. Unlike the aqueduct, which relies on hydraulics to send water downhill and then uphill, the Friant-Kern Canal drops a steady half foot every mile and works on gravity alone. The only pumps out here are metered and belong to the irrigation districts and a handful of municipal users for the purpose of taking that water. Those pumps are silent now. Even at drought's worst, the farmer does manage to receive some

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unmetered water from a whole universe of cracks in the concrete. Unfold acre-feet leak out from the canal's bottom and recharge the aquifer. The windfall delights the adjacent farmers. Since the drought hit and they began digging deeper beneath the earth for more groundwater, the farmers have created a giant sucking action. More canal water is being drawn through the cracks at the same time the ground beneath the canal collapses. The sinking proceeds at a record pace. The poor ditch tender isn't in a position to talk about it. I've done enough of my own digging to know that the Bureau of Reclamation has no idea the extent of the subsidence or what it's going to cost to repair the canal. The canal's capacity to deliver water along one twenty-five-mile stretch has been reduced by as much as 60 percent. Water that moved down the canal at 4,000 cubic feet per second is now moving at 1,650. This is an astonishing figure, though no one in an official position wants the attributed to them. The earth has sunk three feet, but it hasn't made the news. It will likely take a half billion dollars, if not more, to fix.

Like the subways back east, the canal shoots you through the entrails of a place. We pass rows of rotund citrus trees dusted white with a clay that reflects the heat of the sun and land upon a community of battered trailers and shrunken shacks. Welcome to Tooleville, John says, one of the poorest dots on the California map, a tiny rural settlement that once housed Dust Bowl Okies and now houses Dust Bowl Mexicans.

He stops the car, and we linger on the place: busted-out windows, bedsheets for curtains, shells of cars, old tires piled high, rusted mailboxes, snowflake lights never taken down since Christmas, Chihuahuas on the prowl. Where, I wonder, are the three hundred or so residents? "The parents are farmworkers," John says. "The kids are gang workers." It's not an easy thing to hear, especially from such a wise and tolerant man, and I tell him I've struggled myself trying to explain the stubbornness of such a scene. How is it that the Japanese, Hindus and Armenians were able to overcome discrimination and exploitation and move from picking crops to growing crops? Why is it that Mexican farmhands, for more than a century, have been so passive about the concept of owning the land? Might their proximity to the border explain it, a belief kept in the heart that they are here for only a short while and will be returning to the soil of home? Or is it that each new wave of Mexicans who cross the border undermines the bargaining position of the previous wave,



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so that they are never able to gain a real foothold? Or might the root cause be a peasant culture that has responded to Mexico's oppression and corruption by adopting a "live for today" strategy, a reflex strengthened by the oppression on this side of the line?

Whatever gifts and deficits these residents may carry across the border, they also find themselves in a valley where the ladder is missing most of its middle rungs. We've designed a valley economy that provides no real competition to the farm. Each generation of farmer reaches deeper into the rural heart of Mexico for his labor. Once here, the picker, packer, pruner and irrigator occupy a firm but bottom rung on the ladder. No people work harder. But what happens to their children and grandchildren? If they reject the fields, as so many of them understandably do, what becomes of their lives? There is no other major industry here to realize their labor; there are few middle rungs to compete with the fields. Hammer-and-nail jobs offered by the building industry are just another bottom rung.

Whether the gaps in our ladder are by design to keep the worker captive to the fields, or simply a failure of imagination, I don't know. I've heard it explained both ways. What is clear is that we are telling children who come from homes where English is not spoken, where education has for generations been a proposition that ended in the fifth grade, that they must excel and go to college. They must take a leap from the bottom rung to the top rung with no station in between. I have taught children at Fresno State who've made such a leap. I have encountered many others in southeast Fresno, in some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the nation, who might have become electricians or welders or plumbers if their junior highs and high schools had steered them that way. Instead, frustrated by the want of an option other than college, they drop out, join gangs and raise children out of wedlock.

John listens intently, though I'm not sure he's comfortable exploring the matter any further. Maybe he regards our conversation as having ventured a good distance beyond the canal and the subject of water. Maybe he's grown weary of high-minded arguments that reduce valley agriculture to a plantation caricature. He's quiet for a good half minute as we study Tooleville's existence.

"We've always had our Toolevilles and always will," he says finally. "But I used to think of the east side as the exception in the valley. We

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had real communities here, Mark, where whites, Mexicans and Asians integrated. Real honest-to-God American communities. But that has started to change the past few decades."

I wonder if he might be romanticizing the past. He doesn't think so. "That climb up the ladder, sad enough, is not happening the way it should," he says. "The Japanese made it. The Hindus made it. Most of the Okies made it. A lot of Filipinos made it. But the Mexicans as a group are having a harder time. As we've brought in successive generations to work the fields, it's created this underclass."

A long time ago in the valley, an immigrant could sink to his hands and knees in the fields and earn enough money over four or five harvests to buy his own twenty acres—and a ditch full of snowmelt to keep it in water. My grandfather had done exactly that. But no matter how much you bust your ass in the fields today, no matter how committed you are to stacking dollar bills, it's virtually impossible for a farmworker to become a farmer. That chasm is a fact scorched into the ground. Even so, John does not blame the loss of community cohesiveness on economic disparity alone. The separateness he sees on the east side is equally a consequence of immigrants ghettoizing themselves, he believes. As much as some Mexican immigrants want to bust out of the barrio, many others are content to live among themselves. Their mostly undocumented status only serves to widen this chasm. "Something's been lost," he says.

No place is easy to pin down, and the valley may be more elusive than most. It took a Steinbeck and a McWilliams to capture one aspect. It took a Saroyan to capture another. The east side, the west side, the center valley—each has its own relationship to water. That relationship explains not only the type of agriculture practiced in each but the culture itself, why each one looks and smells and vibrates the way it does. The land blessed with river is one kind of place. The worker there is more likely to share in the spoils of irrigation. The land reliant on imported water and water mined from the ground is another kind of place. The way things work there bears more than a passing resemblance to the feudal system. The puzzle of the east side, what makes it such a challenge to unpack, is that it combines the two.

Tooleville is easy to grasp. It exists for a reason. Way back when, the



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Where Tooleville ends at the Friant-Kern canal

migrant worker was locked out of towns and cities. Economics barred the "ditch bank" Okies. Hatred barred the blacks and Mexicans. Racist real estate codes were written in official language; redlining was written in the idiom of wink and nod. Migrants were given little choice but to seek out a patch of alkali in the country and plop down their shacks and trailers. For years, they fetched water by milk pail. Some still do. The codes were wiped clean of offending language years ago, but their effects still linger.

Just the other side of Tooleville, five minutes away, sits the immaculate little town of Exeter. The road sign from here to there would be truer if it marked the distance as one hundred miles. Years of community beautification have turned Exeter into a tourist gem. The restored brick buildings downtown have been painted with splendid murals. One of the larger murals, on the side of the old Mixer pharmacy, depicts the orange harvest as Norman Rockwell might have. A little white girl in a red dress is sitting in the orchard. She's put down her Raggedy Ann doll to clutch an orange bigger than the doll's face. A tall white man elegantly climbs the second rung of a ladder to fill up his canvas sack with fruit. Not a pant leg is smudged. Row after row of perfectly symmetrical trees extend from the flat foreground to the hills in the background. The scale of the farming is industrial, but the work is easygoing.

"I know it's an idealized scene from the 1940s or '50s, but where are

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the Mexicans?" I ask John. He says when he first set eyes upon it, he wondered the same thing. If I look carefully at the faces of workers, an argument can be made that one or two of them appear to be Mexican or perhaps Filipino. I know from my reading of *Factories in the Field* that it was on these same streets, during a carnival to celebrate the end of the 1929 harvest, that white farmworkers pushed Filipino field hands off the sidewalks and physically barred them from places of amusement. One of the molested Filipinos grabbed his bolo knife and stabbed a white man. A mob of whites was immediately organized and roused the Filipinos from the fields and drove them from their labor camps, burning their shacks and tents to the ground. The violence against Filipinos spread to Tulare and then to the Salinas Valley. When John says the Filipinos in the citrus belt "made it," he really means that they made it out of here alive. No Filipino works these fields today. No Filipino grows an orange.

We spend the rest of the afternoon navigating the canal's length, crossing from Tulare County to Kern County, threading through eight different irrigation and water districts, from Lewis Creek to Tea Pot Dome to Rag Gulch. Since the federal canal became a presence seven decades ago, the three counties where the flow goes have nearly doubled their cropland to 1.9 million acres. This growth has occurred both inside the irrigation districts served by the federal water and outside the districts in a no-man's-land without federal water. Nothing has been able to deter the farmers. Not the worst alkali and hardpan. Not the bitter thirst of drought. Consider the Kern-Tulare Water District as it sprawls across both counties. In the second year of this drought, the district was farming 16,776 acres of grapes, nuts and citrus. By the fourth year of drought, it is farming 18,017 acres of grapes, nuts and citrus. As the footprint of agriculture keeps extending outward, the canal water keeps getting spread over a wider and wider area. The groundwater replenishment that occurs because of these imported supplies does not last. As soon as the aquifer builds up, it becomes an excuse for growers to add more farmland and pump even more.

The Central Valley Project, built in the name of saving east side farmland, seems to have lost its way. It's been stretched to a point that can no longer be sustained. As John and I pass through orchards whose emerald leaves have turned a sickly yellow or whose sixty-year-



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old trunks are being ripped from the earth on account of drought, the irony is plain. This is the same ground that was imperiled by successive droughts in the 1920s and 1930s, the same ground that launched the cries of "Steal us a river!" and the building of the project. The land has landed in the same place where it started almost a century ago. Now, there's no more water, near or far, to steal.

A dust devil rises in front of us, its swirl blowing the leaves of the orchard upward, like a gust lifting a woman's skirt. A citrus tree can take a lot, John says. Some of the trees we're passing are nearly one hundred years old and still producing tasty fruit. Sadly, by the looks of things, this orchard won't be able to ride out the drought.

"This is a guy on his uppers," John says. "He may lose his place of 'Uppers?'"

"Yeah, he lost his lower teeth from grinding. Now all he's got left are the uppers."

For the most part, the ranches on either side of the canal are even smaller than I thought they'd be. Not even the big growers own big chunks of land in the citrus belt. A guy might be farming a thousand acres, but it's broken up into twenty acres here, forty acres there and eighty acres ten miles away, John says. Even Resnick grows his citrus on lots of smaller ranches. There's a good explanation for this. Forty acres of citrus can still sustain a family, and this is why so many of the original families have held on to the land. The wealthier growers who might have accumulated citrus empires were prevented from doing so by federal reclamation law. The 960-acre limit wasn't openly flouted in the citrus belt the way it was elsewhere. The law, however, doesn't apply anymore. When the water contracts recently came up for renewal, the east side irrigation districts borrowed enough money from Wells Fargo to pay off the federal government for the canal's original construction costs. In the process, the districts freed themselves from the dictates of acreage limits. There are no more obstacles left to slow the shift of small ranches becoming larger ranches, and the culture of the east side will go with it.

On the way back to his packing shed, I tell John what the Munns told me: He's now an endangered species standing the same doomed ground as the Tipton kangaroo rat.

"What's stopping these hedge funds and pension groups from

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swooping in and buying this ranch and that ranch?" I ask him. "They can accumulate five thousand acres of citrus and get the federal water for cheap."

"They're doing it as we speak," he says. "They're spending millions of dollars taking out old varieties and planting new ones. The only way a small guy is going to hang on is if he's willing to do something crazy."

With another do-or-die harvest of citrons in front of him, he doesn't have to explain what "crazy" means.

It was J. G. Boswell who first told me the story of Otis Booth and his orchard perched on a rocky hillside in the far northern reach of the citrus belt. Booth was a cousin to Otis Chandler, the Stanford shotputting champion who became the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*. As the great-grandsons of the epic bellower General Harrison Gray Otis, Booth and Chandler were both beneficiaries of the Owens River heist that created Los Angeles. The way the family trust fund worked, the Chandler kids had a lot more money and clout than the Booth kids. Otis Booth got his engineering degree from Caltech and an MBA from Stanford and then went to see his cousins about a possible role in the newspaper dynasty. They named him vice president of production, a fancy way of saying he was now in charge of procuring the paper that the news was printed on. He made a comfortable living and built a house in San Marino like the rest of them. By his mid-thirties, he had mastered the skills of fly-fishing, big-game hunting, saving money and investing money. He and his buddy Charlie Munger were making a tidy sum buying and selling condos on Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena when they heard about a prodigy from Omaha, Nebraska, named Warren Buffett. They were so beguiled by his skills that they kept shoveling money to him. Booth's early investments in Berkshire Hathaway were somewhere in the range of \$1 million. Forty years on, he was worth nearly \$3 billion.

Booth was no farmer, of course. He had inherited his first forty acres in Ivanhoe from his Grandma Farnsworth and hired a professional to plant the trees for him. That was back in 1955. He quickly discovered that selling oranges made for a decent return, but the real windfall was the open-ended tax write-offs that the federal government allowed for growing them. Everything from trees to tractors to Cadillacs (if a Cadil-



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lac is what you considered to be your tractor) was a deduction. The millionaires of Exeter, who reported yearly incomes of thirty and forty grand, were experts in tax avoidance. Booth, a tall man with shoulders beefed up from lifting weights with cousin Otis, drove up and forty the citrus belt looking for more orchards to buy. Like fishing the White River in Colorado or hunting rare species in Africa or exploring the South Pole, collecting orange groves became one of his hobbies. He started on flat ground and ended up climbing the hill. He didn't stop until he owned ten thousand acres. In the citrus belt they called him "the king of the navels."

He'd been blessed with four children, three from his first marriage and one from his second, which allowed him some swing to get around reclamation law. He put enough 960-acre chunks in his name and the names of his wife, children, grandchildren and nephews that it almost covered the entire ten thousand acres. His daughter Loren from his first marriage was Daddy's girl. He could take her fishing and hunting and she'd hold her own. She could get on a horse and fly. She majored in animal science at Cal Poly and met and married a Bakersfield potato farmer. She had bothered to learn enough agriculture to bug her father and his citrus consultant about what they were doing on her 960 acres. They tried to brush her off, but her questions only got more pointed once she graduated from the California Ag Leadership program. Why was her father allowing the company that sold him farm chemicals to instruct him on how much chemicals to use? Why didn't he have his own independent pest control adviser? Why was he allowing his packer to be his picker? There wasn't a single employee at Booth Ranches tasked with counting the oranges that went into each bin. Valencia trees loaded with fruit—fifty bins per acre—were packing out at twenty bins an acre. Something was amiss.

This was how she "pestered" her way into the fields and the front office. By the time she was done pestering, Booth Ranches was packing its own citrus in its own shed and selling oranges with its own marketing team under its own labels. Father and daughter were partners. Divorced from the potato farmer, Loren Booth moved to the cattle spread on top of the hill that overlooked the orchards. People who visited her mansion said it belonged on the cover of *Architectural Digest*. Her father came to trust her enough that he'd be away for weeks at

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a time at his home in Bel Air. He'd fly up in his Learjet 24 and stay long enough to approve some of her bigger decisions and then fly back. When he died, in 2008, she took the advice of old Charlie Munger, executor of his estate, and bought out all her siblings. Now she's one of the biggest citrus growers in California. "It's all me. Just me," she tells me on the phone. "I'm the only one drowning in a dry well."

The new headquarters for Booth Ranches looks nothing like an office. Crafted in the style of a grand Spanish-Mexican hacienda, it appears lifted from the old Californio days. Roses and fountains lead to a smart-door carved from a huge split of wood. I'm tempted to act the smart-ass and ask the secretary where the last vaqueros twirling their lassos are hiding. That's when, out of the corner of my eye, I catch the big framed photo hanging on the wall. It's a picture of a vaquero named Buddy Montes, who watches over a few hundred of Booth's cattle on the hilltop. Buddy is a Tejon Indian whose father was head cowboy at Tejon Ranch, the 270,000-acre spread in the mountains between here and Los Angeles. The ranch was once part of Chandler territory, and Otis Booth enjoyed going up there to hunt elk. That was how he met Buddy's father.

Among the decorative items sits an Old West safe and a beautifully restored saddle studded in silver. I'm about to feel its polish when I hear a jangling from down the tile-floored hallway. A woman in her late fifties, lean and strong, her brown-blond hair tied in a ponytail, is fast approaching. She's wearing jeans and cowboy boots outfitted with real silver spurs. Each drop of her boot sounds another jangle. "I got up early this morning and rode," Loren Booth says, explaining her getup. "I needed to escape."

She talks fast and chews off her words. Her father has left her quite a chore. He overplanned his oranges by more than three thousand acres. He stuck trees in ground with no groundwater and too little surface water from the federal project to cover the shortfall. It was trick enough to wiggle by in the years of decent snowmelt. In dry times, the system became a turnip with nothing left to squeeze. Her father's water broker, an engineer named Dennis Keller, was considered a savant in the wheeling of snowmelt from one region to the other. Keller would find a block of water that a faraway irrigation district was willing to sell

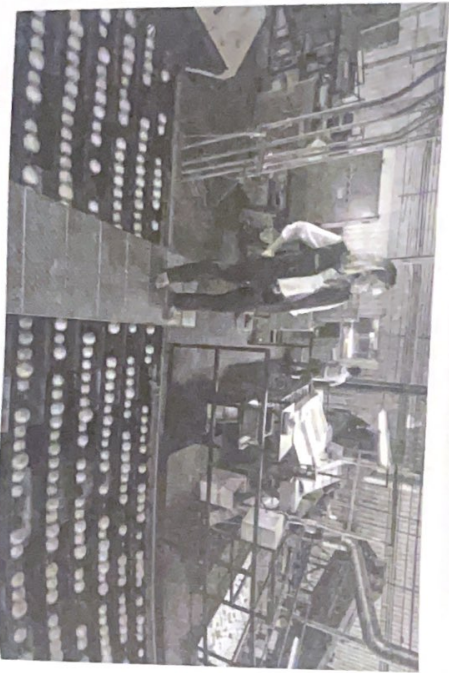


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and grab it for a price that Otis Booth, ranked 189 on Forbes list of the 400 richest Americans, didn't mind paying. The water, thus purchased, would be deposited in the aqueduct like money in a bank account and would make its journey from west side to east side via a little marvel called the Cross Valley Canal. A few days later, an equivalent amount of water would be available for withdrawal from a turnout on the Friant-Kern Canal. Traveling a go-between of ditches, pipes, pumps and drip lines, the water would scale the hillside to irrigate 1,538 acres of oranges that had no business being up there.

"In all the years of the Friant-Kern, we've never had a year of zero deliveries," she says. "Even in the worst drought back in 1976, we were able to get some federal water. But zero upon zero?"

She tours me around the kitchen, where she serves her staff a meal every Tuesday and Thursday, and then the sales office, where fruit brokers, cars glued to phones, wave hello. In her office, she fumbles around for a photo of her father and Otis Chandler on one of their hunting or fishing trips. "I had the weirdest upbringing. I mean, there we were living in San Marino with all these captains of industry and their socialite wives and pampered kids. But my dad was just about the most frugal person you could imagine. I never had a tennis or dance lesson. We didn't do anything. Now, when it came time for me to be presented



Loren Booth oversees the citrus packing line she designed herself.

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to society. I was presented like all the others at the Pasadena Guild of Children's Hospital Debutante Ball. Oh, yes. At the Huntington Hotel. I was Otis Booth's daughter, even though he had divorced my mother when I was in the fifth or sixth grade and married a wealthy woman named Dody. Thank goodness I loved animals. He wasn't really a presence in my life until his last five years, when we began to redo our entire operation. We really got close. It was a lot of fun."

Even before this dry time, she could see the upside-down legacy her father had left her: too many oranges and not enough water. Back in 2009, she'd reduced his ten-thousand-acre footprint by selling off twenty-five hundred acres of marginal orchards in one district and another. A few months ago, she sold off four hundred acres located outside the reach of an irrigation district, an area dependent on a water table fast dwindling. She's pruned back some of her orchards so radically that the trees appear shrublike. With their canopies rendered practically fruitless, she can starve the trees of water and still be able to green them up when the drought ends, assuming it ends in the coming winter. But even with these measures, she still finds herself short of thousands of acre-feet to irrigate her trees on the hill.

After an exhaustive search, Dennis Keller located enough water from the open market to cover the cutbacks in the government supply. Problem is, the sellers are demanding up to \$1,500 an acre-foot for this water, twice what it would cost in a non-drought year. She and her fellow growers here, members of the Hills Valley Irrigation District, aren't about to let water-rich farmers to the west and north prey on their desperation. They've decided to make do with half the water they truly need.

"We're looking at pushing out another three hundred and fifty to four hundred acres," she says with a groan. "No other choice. Maybe when the rain comes back, we can plant it again."

I assume she means the navels and mandarins up the hill that she and her father planted together. But she's actually talking about bulldozing another orchard on flatter ground miles away. This doesn't make sense, at least not to anyone making an unsentimental calculation of things. Why favor hilly ground where the aquifer is poor and government subsidies run tiffy, I ask her. If you need to tear out more orchards and reduce your footprint, doesn't it make sense to do that up here?

"You can look at Hills Valley and say, 'No way. No way should citrus



trees be planted up here.' But this is virgin ground," she says firmly. "The soil is some of the most productive in the citrus belt. It grows beautiful fruit. These orchards back up against the mountain, so they're protected. We're sitting in the best of the thermal belt. This is the warmest ranch we farm."

She knows time isn't on the side of Hills Valley. The state's groundwater management plan, once it goes into effect, could very well declare the district's fragile water table off-limits to agriculture. She and the other growers on the hill would then have to shut down their pumps and rely on the government canal alone. This would make it near impossible, come the next drought, to find enough water to keep the trees alive. She may be a cattle rancher, too, but it would not be easy to see the orchard return to range.

A half mile up the hill, the road peters out and I can't tell where it picks up again. Inside the lush grove, her irrigation men are planting meters three feet into the earth, so they can constantly monitor the moisture content. The sensory sticks allow her to turn on the drip lines only when the trees are in an optimum phase of growth. If all goes according to plan, she might increase her yields and reduce her water use by as much as 30 percent. Maybe technology will get her through this drought with no more harm. Maybe it will allow these trees on the hilltop to survive the next one, and the next one. For the time being at least, the horizon is a billow of emerald green.

There is only one Mulholland left in the world who can trace his branch to the William who dried up Owens Valley and gave birth to modern-day Los Angeles. This last Mulholland, Tom Mulholland, happens to propagate and grow an aberrant variety of mandarin orange on fourteen hundred acres in the citrus belt. Like the Booths' saga, the Mulhollands' story traces a path of California. The orange did not vanish with the paving over of Los Angeles. Neither did the Holstein. They simply moved over the mountain from one valley to the next, following the waters of irrigation. Seeing how this was the road I was retracing, I couldn't very well leave the east side without knocking on the door of William Mulholland's only great-grandson. "I have three sisters and I have two daughters," he tells me on the phone. "There are no men left in the family. I'm the last of the Mulholland line."

Citrus brokers down in Los Angeles had warned me that Mulholland

was unlike any other mandarin grower I would encounter, more hippie than rancher who even into his mid-sixties possessed a "wild energy" that was both gift and curse. He gyrated from nursery to orchard with a mind constantly overtaken by new ideas. Some of the ideas were brilliant and realizable, others pure duds. He might have become the richest citrus farmer in California, they said, had he been able to distinguish between the two. As it was, he was a wealthy man who had helped revolutionize the industry, pushing California citrus culture away from its roots in the Washington navel and toward varieties of mandarins whose sweet and tart delight the consumer. Before the Cutie, before the Halo, there was the Delite. It was propagated, watered, picked and marketed by Mulholland.

A few miles north of Orange Cove, four hundred feet above the valley floor, I pull up to his entrance gate, which is even more odd and arresting than he had described to me. It is a beautiful piece of metal artwork carved in ornate depictions of oaks and redwoods that he designed himself as a "tribute to two species of trees that have been nearly decimated as mankind took over California." The metal is painted a reddish wood color that only adds to its effect, and I am compelled to get out of the car and touch and study it as one might a piece of art. After a few minutes of communing with the gate, I glide down the long driveway—"MULHOLLAND HIGHWAY," the sign reads—toward a citrus estate not unlike the ones in the Pasadena picture postcards, circa 1905. The orchard isn't an orchard but a backyard. The hedges are tall, and the fountains are burbling. Grandkids are splashing in the swimming pool. Tom is tall with broad shoulders, wire-rimmed glasses and a Mulholland balding head. He talks fast enough that I'll have to slow down my tape recorder to play him back. "I had ADHD before there was ADHD," he jokes. His father's recordings of Jimmy Smith riffing on his Hammond organ served as his "Ritalin" growing up. He takes me into a study where a big elongated banner hangs from the wall. It's the giant face of Great-grandpa William, of neither ill nor good humor, chomping on a cigar beneath his beautiful mustache. When the old man died, in the summer of 1935, his farm in the San Fernando Valley went to his son Perry, a tall man with a cruel bent who refused to sell out even as housing tracts and shopping malls surrounded him. Grandpa Perry held on until 1965, until L.A. sprawl made it all but impossible to farm grapefruits anymore. He sold the ranch to a Northridge developer, who







'Do you believe in it, too?' I panic. I don't know marketing. I don't own a packinghouse. I'm a nurseryman and family farmer. My father drummed it in my head to never borrow money. So I go down to Los Angeles and see Berne Evans at his Sun Pacific office. He's one of the biggest growers in the state. He doesn't know me from a load of coal. I go in with a contract already written about marketing my variety, the Delite. 'Mr. Evans, would you like to join my organization?' He *ha, ha, ha-ed* me. He penetrated all my orifices, and I walked out with no deal."

By himself, knowing he had a head start, Tom took a shot. He began selling his Delites to Whole Foods and Trader Joe's. Walmart even gave him a spot in its produce aisle. Consumers loved his Murcott. He picked and sold the Delites from February to April. It was a short window, but it belonged to him. Then, just when it looked like he had snagged the prize, the Cutie came crashing through the door. Resnick and Evans were riding a rocket. Who cared that their brand was a fabrication? The Cutie wasn't one piece of fruit but three varieties of mandarins: the Clemenule, the Tango and the Murcott. Each variety had its own flavor and ripened at a different time. But by marketing all three as one brand, Resnick and Evans covered multiple seasons. They made consumers believe, through tens of millions of dollars in advertising, that a spring Cutie was the same fruit as a winter Cutie. If the November Cutie was drier, the shopper assumed it was happenstance. If the March Cutie was sweeter and juicier, the shopper figured it was the way the fruit was supposed to be. Who knew that one was a Clemenule and the other was a Murcott? Masquerading as one, Cuties could outlast any competitor. Suddenly, every citrus grower in the valley was planting different varieties of mandarins to sell into the Cuties line. As space in the produce aisle squeezed down, Mulholland tried to find new niches.

And then on Halloween Day 2011, the two big guys, Resnick and Evans, met at the Jonathan Club in Santa Monica to iron out a dispute. They were fifty-fifty partners in the mandarin deal. When one planted a new block of trees, the other had to plant a corresponding block. Evans had found out that Resnick was adding acres without his approval. Lunch had not yet arrived when Evans decided to broach the subject. Resnick cut him off. "Berne, I'm taking over this business. And I'm going to charge you six percent commission for selling your fruit." Evans was a citrus man. He was the one who had come up with the

idea of growing different mandarins. He had shared the idea with Resnick, who didn't know the difference between a Murcott and a Tango. He wasn't about to be turned into a common grower of fruit for Wonderful. Evans got up from his chair and thought about decking Resnick right there. Instead, he told him to go to hell and stalked out. By the time they were done fighting, three years later, Evans had paid the Resnicks \$40 million to buy the Cuties label. The Resnicks ginned up a new brand, Halos.

A pair of heavyweights warring for market dominance left Mulholland too little space. His Delite could not survive on its own. He had to make a choice: join the Cuties family or join the Halos family. "They did three mandarins as one brand," he explains. "And I was being too honest. I was too small, and they were so big. Even at fourteen hundred acres, I couldn't compete. Not enough land. Not enough water. I had to pick a side, so I chose Resnick."

Then the drought arrived, and the feds slashed deliveries to nothing, and he cranked up the volume on his pumps, only to now watch fifteen of his wells go dry. Even his "wagon wheel" wells, workhorses extraordinaire, have stopped producing. These ingenious wells were dug in the 1960s and required a worker to enter a hole seventy feet deep until he hit a fissure of water in the rock. If the crew above him miscalculated the water's pressure and volume, the fissure could easily drown him. It wasn't so much an aquifer he was striking but a vein of water that extended across the granite shelf. A conventional pump—designed to suck water from a vertically deep aquifer, not a horizontally wide and shallow one—would have done little good down in the rock. But the wagon wheel well used holes bored laterally, like spokes, for hundreds of feet across the granite to reach a fissure of water. "My wagon wheels are studs. They never go dry. But they're going dry now," Tom tells me. "They're coughing up water for an hour or two and then nothing."

To get his trees through the summer, he's negotiating with the water-rich families sixty-five miles to the west who raise row crops on the historic floodplain of the San Joaquin River. Back in the 1940s, when the river was dammed and the flow to their farms shut off, these families sold their old Henry Miller rights to the government. In return, they



received first draw to the federal water imported from the delta. Even in the worst of dry times, the Sacramento water flows to them. The asking price for a chunk of this primo supply is \$1,500 an acre-foot. This is the water that Loren Booth has passed up. This is the water that Mulholland cannot afford to pass up. "We all have our different calculations," he explains. "Mine tells me that I can sell my mandarins for a high enough price to make that high-dollar water pencil out."

Citrus growers are pushing out older trees to squeeze through the drought, but none of those trees are mandarins. The mandarin is the closest thing a grower has to a sure bet. If not for its rise over the past few decades, the citrus belt, too, might be part of the nut belt. But with the returns on the fruit every bit as lousy as those on almonds and pistachios, citrus still rules here. Not only can the mandarin cover the swindle of drought's high-priced water, but it uses 15 to 20 percent less water than the almond.

Mulholland sounds more like an environmentalist than a rancher as he pays through his nose for the water needed to survive this drought. "Maybe I'm just as guilty as the big guy," he says. "Manifest destiny teased us onto ground that maybe should have never been farmed. The tragedy of the commons—that's exactly what we're seeing out here. Reasonable people, for the most part, acting reasonably. But the cumulative effect of it is compromising the resource for everyone and every use."

I look him in the eye, wondering if he's being sincere or simply working me. He's glued to a barstool at the kitchen counter and gazes back at his daughter Heather, who's been sitting quietly for the past half hour in a big sofa chair. She knew all the way back in grammar school that she wanted to follow her father and grandfather into citrus. "My sixth-grade project was on insects beneficial to agriculture," she explains. Now a partner in the operation, she is a keeper, too, of the Mulholland story. There are moments when her father's mind grabs at errant thoughts and takes off, and she scoots to the edge of her seat and seems about to jump in to guide him back. Only she resists doing so. She knows this is the way her father, raised on the jazz of Charles Mingus, tells his stories, and she loves him for it. But now as he's finishing up, explaining how his dream, so close, got away, she has tears in her eyes. "I should have borrowed money," he says. "I should have built my

own packinghouse. But I wasn't taught by my dad to think that way. I was a one-man band. I was doing the fiddle and beating the drum. We gave it three years, and then we put the last Delite in the box. "I had to pick a side. And that's the story. We're a grower of W. Murcotts, but it's hard to say that it's 'our' fruit anymore."