

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

An Uyghur American Story

PY · Wednesday, August 26th, 2020

We walk out of the apartment building together, after a long ride down the elevator from the 18th floor. Our arms are linked, her body leaning into mine for support. We turn left and make our way across the broken pavement towards the street.

The smell of fresh naan fills the air already dense with smog. I can't help that my pace quickens, drawn to the source, dragging my Apa along.

Stacks of naan line the tables, surrounding the portable fire pit behind the old man in the front. We pick up 2 big pieces, then start to head back. We don't speak.

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A week later I get a call in the middle of the night.

Answering sleepily, I ask "Apa?"

She says my name, drawn out softly "[highlight color=#000000 ]Pehr-y-sehhh[/highlight]"

"Apa, conduc yaxshimu?"                    [Apa, how are you?]

"Men yaxshi"                                    [I'm good]

"I love you"

\*She laughs\*

"I love you too"

The call ends.

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I know this to be impossible.

7000 miles separate us.

It has been six years since the last time I saw her

A direct call between two lines is impossible.

Every recent interaction we've had is imagined through something that can only be described as a likeness to a dream, but feeling much too real to be limited to this scope.

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Everything seems hazy now.
I'm dreaming of her hands wrapped around mine
Tai tai
Tai tai
I'm dreaming of my feet on top of hers, arms outstretched, taking baby steps

Life fades back.
She's many steps away from me now
My infancy spent with her feels like nothing.

I look at pictures to remember how her face looked,
Wondering how different it looks now

Wondering if her sleek black hair has grayed,
If it is up in a bun,
Or if it is falling loose, long, draping over her shoulder blades and grazing against her back

The only time it felt like this was in between buns.

But I'm wondering if that is different now

Wondering if she smells the same

Wondering until it hurts my brain

Wondering until my vision blurs

Wondering even though it f[highlight color=#000000]uckin[/highlight]g hurts

An insatiable wonder

An incurable pain

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I'm not ashamed to admit that I cry sometimes uncontrollably, at random.

A thought finds its way into my head

I start to spiral

I have a cousin, a first cousin, the daughter of my father's younger sister, who is exactly one week older than I.

Two times in my life we have met.

Two times in my life, I have been there to visit.

Two times in my life, we have had temporary friendships that lasted a family vacation, met with years of no contact in between.

We don't talk.

Maybe it's better that way, I tell myself. You can't miss who you don't know, you can't mourn the loss of something you have never had.

But I miss and mourn anyways.

Driving home from work on a Sunday night, I cry uncontrollably, at random.

I yearn for the relationship I should have had.

I miss a person that I hardly know.

I mourn the loss of the friendship I never had.

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It doesn't take a lot for me to get taken someplace in my head.

Headlines

News headlines read out things that shock the world, but don't shock me:

"Study Links Nike, Adidas And Apple To Forced Uighur Labor"

“China follows lead of Nazis and Stalin”

“The coronavirus brings new and awful repression for Uighurs in China”

BBC and CNN and WP and the NYT are telling the world about us

The world seems to be shocked and full of condemnation

But no one does anything.

The conditions get worse for us

More headlines

More condemnation

But no one does anything.

I’m afraid that it might take too long

I’m afraid that my grandma and my cousins and my aunts and my uncles and my great aunts and my second cousins too will all be long gone

Because no one does anything.

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Long gone is the place where we turned left and then right and then down the street towards the corner where the man sells naan

Long gone is the man with the donkey and the cart with all the melons and peaches and grapes and dates

Long gone is the place

Long gone are the people

Not really

But long gone is the laughter and long gone is the small talk in the street

And long gone are the times when your neighbors come over to eat

Long gone are the times, where we had farms and land with trees

And long gone are the times when we could go outside and cross the street to enter

the high rise building in which we now reside without scanning our hands and our eyes

Long gone is the place

In which my grandfather was buried

They forced my grandmother to dig him up and move him

Or

Let the next high rise building live on top of him

I don't know what she did.

Because we can't talk

But the world knows

And no one does anything.

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Because

We are Uyghurs, Oooouey-guuhhrs

Or sometimes we are Uighurs, but please, not wee-gurs

Because

Some of us are Muslim

Because

We are not Chinese and

Because We do not fit in well with the CCP.

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The water has to be just the right temperature
Not too hot, not too cold
Or else the yeast won't work.

I start to pour it slowly over the mountain of flour

Don't forget the salt.

I knead it into a dough and let it sit

It has to rise

After some time, I knead it again and let it sit a little longer

Cut it into pieces, and make little rounds

Brush them with milk, finely diced onion, and sesame seeds

Bake at 375

Not too low, or it won't have a nice crack.

Not too hot, or it won't be soft inside.

Bake at 375

Because we don't have portable clay ovens anymore

Long gone are the clay ovens too, after all.

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