

Chalk

Zaneb G [REDACTED]

Social Studies 10—1

Ms. Kadri

June 9th, 2020

Chalk

* The following is a work of fiction, and any references to real institutions may contain *
discrepancies concerning accuracy. These are the fault of the author, and the purpose of this
work is to spread awareness concerning human rights violations.



They came in the night.

The pounding of fists on the front door was drowned by the alarmed susurrations of blood in my ears. I tripped out of my sheets, hastening to the cold, moonlit window. Shadows twisted through the thin fabric, blotting out the wan streetlights. There were four, maybe. No, five—

“Open the door! The Kashgar police command you to open this door immediately!”

At the muffled authoritative voice, dizzying panic blossomed in me. Fumbling for my hijab, I crossed into the dark room to arouse my slumbering grandfather, only to find him already awake and reaching for me.

“Ata, what’s happening?”

“Bowa, the police—”

“We command you to open this door immediately! If you fail to comply we will resort to force! Open this door!”

My grandfather’s arms wrapped protectively around me. Worried eyes turned to me.

“Bismillah, why are they here? We haven’t done anything.” Flicking on his light, he retrieved the ID marking him Uygher from his bedside table. *“Ata, please stay here. I will see what they want. We’ve done nothing wrong. They’ll be off on their way. Don’t worry.”*

The door shuddered with a violent blow, followed by another. My thoughts fluttered like caged doves. *Do they know? Is it possible they found out?*

I fought the urge to cry out for my grandfather as he shuffled towards the door. My eyes searched the room frantically, hunting irrationally for an escape, even though I knew it was futile. The door crashed open with a resounding bang. My heart lurched into my throat.

“We order you to step outside of the house! We are conducting an arrest! Every member of this household, outside!”

The officer’s shout reverberated in my bones. Fear paralyzed me to my spot. The pounding in my head grew louder, drowning out my racing thoughts. *They know, they know, they know—*

“I said get outside!” the commanding voice returned, the sound of boots crashing through the house towards me. An iron grip jerked me by the arm, dragging me out into the biting wind of the night. I landed unceremoniously next to my grandfather, crassly thrown to the ground. Snow bled into my thin clothes. A violently bright light forced itself into my eyes. I cried out, throwing up my hands.

“Are you Arezou Baurzhan?” the unyielding voice demanded. I squinted, shivering on the floor, making out the blurry image of the officer towering over me. His face was covered in a black uniform mask, flat eyes watching me. His foot launched into my grandfather’s ribs, eliciting a scream from me. “I asked, *are you Arezou Baurzhan?*”

“Yes!” I cried through chattering teeth. “Please, don’t hurt my grandfather. He is frail and old, please—”

“Speak only when you are spoken to!” the officer shouted, silencing me at once. Tears dripped cruelly from my chin as the officer snatched the ID from my grandfather’s hands, probing through it and tossing it back at him. The cruel officer rose from his knees, taking and inspecting the ID another officer had retrieved from the house. My ID. He turned his impassive eyes to grandfather’s quailing form on the snow. “You’re lucky, old man. We don’t have orders for your arrest today.”

Two arms roughly tore me from the ground, binding my wrists behind me in frigid shackles. The cruel officer shined his invasive light in my face again. “Arezou Baurzhan, you are under arrest for the distribution of propaganda and acts of terrorism against the territory of Xinjiang and acts of property damage. You are to speak when spoken to and will comply with full obedience.”

The arms holding me began forcing me forward. Sudden, thick fear rose in me. *They’re taking me away, they’re taking me to the camps, they’re taking me like Mama and Baba—*

I staggered as a sharp kick to my shin sent a bolt of pain shrieking through my leg. “You will comply!” the officer screamed, placing his hand on his belt. A baton hung loosely from his hip. “You will comply or the old man will come, too.”

My lips quivered at the threat, but I clenched my jaw. I wasn’t going to let them hurt *Bowa*. My grandfather’s cries faded into the bitter wind as my tears froze on my cheeks, legs numbing as I walked to my demise.

~~~~~

“Is this you?”

The picture of the girl before me blurred. She was wearing dark clothes, her face masked, clearly with the intention of remaining anonymous. Her head was half-turned away from the secret camera that had captured her picture, the can of yellow spray paint hanging from her gloved hand.

The officer slammed his hands on the desk, his massive form shadowing me from the brilliant interrogation lights burning in the cramped room. *“Is this you?”*

Tears blurred my eyes. One spilled, splashing across the desk. My wrists burned, raw from rubbing them anxiously against the chains binding them to the chair. *“Yes.”*

I had thought I was careful. I always checked for cameras, for people nearby. I always disguised myself well and always worked at night. How had I been so stupid? How had I missed this camera?

The officer scornfully threw more pictures across the desk. *“Are these also your crimes?”*

Damning image after damning image littered the table. Spray painted *ayaan* on the side of an abandoned house, painted over in parts. The half-scrubbed Xinjiang flag in the ice plaza. Calligraphy graffitied on the fish stall. All my artwork, my sins that hung me in the end.

A disgusted noise escaped the officer. *“You thought you were being brave, huh?”*

I shrank. *Yes.*

*“These acts of vandalism are dangers to society. You are inciting violence and terrorism with these acts of propaganda. You thought you were being a clever little girl? The heroic street artist vigilante?”* I cringed away as he leered at me. I felt reduced to a small, quivering girl.

I hated the fear strangling my voice, but asked, *“Are you sending me to the detention camps?”*

The officer appraised me with those unfeeling, dark eyes. A cruel smile split his face. “If you’re lucky.”

Chills rolled down my spine. *What?*

I jerked as a second figure emerged from the far, shadowed corner of the room. I hadn’t noticed this presence before. Had he been there the whole time?

He was even more terrifying than the officer, taller and wider than him, dressed in a dark green military-style uniform, unlike the officer’s black uniform. While I could see the officer’s gruelling eyes above his mask, this man’s whole face was covered in a tinted helmet. Fear seized my lungs.

“What is her age?” the figure demanded. My flesh crawled at the sound of his voice.

“Sixteen, according to her papers.”

“Mhm. Has she had a health check done?”

“Not yet, but her medical history seems stable.”

“Good.” The figure stalked threateningly forward, almost predatory-like. I couldn’t see his face, but I knew his eyes were invasive. I fought the urge to curl into myself. “Have her complete a full health inspection. This one looks good and healthy.” The man paused, and I could almost sense a smile. “They’re looking for a heart.”

The officer nodded. “I’ll keep that in mind. This was the last prospect of the day?”

“Yes. She is the last new prisoner?”

“Yes.”

Without another word, the large man ducked out of the room. My clothes were plastered to my back, sweat running cold. *What was all that?*

The officer turned back to face me, his brows drawn together. He gestured to the baton hanging from his belt. “You are a prisoner of the territory of Xinjiang and sentenced to execution. You will comply. Understand that. You will now be checked, and brought to your cell. You will comply. Resist, and I am not afraid to use force against you. Your heart will not suffer a few bruises.”

I cringed at his claws on my arm, but my legs moved as he dragged me from my chair and pushed me down the narrow hallway. His proximity was terrifying, and I didn’t dare utter a word in front of him, but my heart cried out. *Ya Allah, please help.*



I felt violated. I felt naked, and bare.

They’d stripped my hijab.

I lay curled on my side, far from the bars of my cell, sobbing from shame. My fists tightened in my hair. I wished to tear it all out.

The other four women in my cell were huddled against the far side of the cell, away from me. I’d been hysterical when I’d first been deposited in my cell, and they had all kept their distance. Now, one of them crawled to me and draped a comforting arm on my back. I cringed and cried out, the memory of the intrusive hands of the nurse who had checked me and probed me everywhere reigniting against my skin. The older woman’s arms radiated warmth as she pulled me closer.

“Hush, child. You are so young to cry so much.”

I wailed even louder. “They took my hijab! They took my—”

“Shhh, *inna ma'al usri yusraa*, ah? These cowards are deprived of those words, but you and I know them, don't we?”

I jerked in response to her words, immediate fear of the guards overhearing them uttered from her mouth clouding my thoughts. They had seemed not to notice. I turned back to the older woman, feeling like a child, taking in her scarred face through a bleary film.

“What are they going to do to us?” I whispered.

“Don't you know?” a sudden hysterical voice interrupted. I flinched, seeing one of the women in the corner of the cell train red-rimmed eyes on me. “They're going to execute us and sell us.”

Terror bled through my skin, a live fire twisting in my heart. “What?”

“They're going to execute us for our crimes, and sell our organs.” She suddenly lunged for the bars, grasping them and shaking them desperately. “Isn't that right? You're going to kill us and sell us, right? RIGHT?” A wild scream tore from her lungs.

A baton swung across the bars, the metal clang resonating in my skull. “*Silence!*” the patrolling guard bellowed. “One more word from any of you—”

“And what? You can't starve us, and you can't hurt us, because you need us healthy enough to sell. Isn't that right? Isn't that—”

The bars suddenly crashed open. The guard sauntered in, snatching the shrieking woman by the arm and jerking her violently away. Another guard locked the cell again, the screams of the woman fading into the distance. I folded my arms over my head, hunkering against the wall, and sobbed softly, until my exhaustion fell away and I melted into a black sleep.





The shrieking woman was never brought back.

My heart ached for *Bowa*. What had happened to him? Who was taking care of him now? He was all alone. I thought of the few relatives and friends who visited regularly. I prayed that they would visit him soon and learn of what had happened.

Anger stewed in my heart. The festering poison materialized in my twitchy fingers, which preyed at my hair. My art had led me to this. My art had hurt *Bowa*, had landed me behind bars, had led to my accusation of terrorism. I'd been so immensely stupid to create the art in the first place. I had known it was dangerous. Why had I done it?

*You thought you were being a clever little girl? The heroic street artist vigilante?* The officer's voice resounded with a vengeance, nails drumming in my skull.

I exhaled a frustrated, shaky breath. I was finished crying. I'd drained myself during the two weeks I had been kept there.

A long, patrolling shadow swept the wall. I watched the figure of the night guard pacing back and forth in front of the cell, his lit cigarette glowing in the dark, a lone firefly. We were guarded at all times. We were visited daily by the man clad in dark green. He ensured we were not starving ourselves or refusing meals, and required daily reports from the nurse. I hadn't seen the officer who had arrested and interrogated me since then.

I rolled onto my other side, the piece of chalk stowed in my pants poking into my leg. I shifted inconspicuously. I'd managed to smuggle the small nub from my old change of clothes into my prison issue clothes. I didn't know why I'd kept it; the urge to draw and create now lay dormant.

The anger resurfaced, and I marveled at Meryem, the older woman who had comforted me. How was she still patient? The encroaching fear of execution and the selling of our—I couldn't even finish the thought. Anxiety kept me awake, terrifying images of bloodied, torn corpses tearing me from my sleep. I didn't understand how Meryem remained calm about everything. How she still had faith that everything would be okay.

*Inna ma'al usri yusraa. Indeed, with hardship will be ease.* Those had been the words she had quoted. How could she believe them, sitting awaiting her death by a surgical blade?

Approaching footsteps broke the quiet. A glaring light bleached the cell. The other women stirred from their sleep, confused. We'd never been visited by the large man in the night before.

"Wake up, all of you!" I shuddered at the familiar voice. The officer who had arrested me appeared, an ant compared to the giant masked man. My fear subdued as returning anger muddled it. His baton strummed against the bars, the unsettling metallic whine tearing the other women from their slumber.

I jerked back as the cell door swung open. Harsh hands bound my wrists and forced a blindfold over my eyes. I stumbled into the other women as the officers barked, directing us outside of the cell and outside of the station. The chilly breath of snowflakes melted on my face. The humming of an engine pattered nearby.

Cold clamps fastened around my ankle, chains rattling on the floor. The cramped confines of what felt like a truck's trunk closed around me. Meryem's soft whispers of prayer filled the dark as the door slammed and the truck began moving.

"Where are they taking us? Where are we going?"

“To our dooms,” Dilnaz responded, the young woman’s voice sounding from somewhere behind me. Dilnaz was only twenty. She’d been arrested for giving Arabic lessons in her house, and had been awaiting execution for nearly a month before being picked by the large man and moved to our cell.

“Are we going to be executed?”

“Most certainly.”

Hitched crying and fervent whispering spanned the thick air in the trunk. My nostrils burned. I was afraid I was hyperventilating. We’d been driving forever. My body ached. It had been an hour, I thought. Patterns of colour bloomed on the underside of my eyelids, a dull pain throbbing in them from the pressure of the blindfold. Meryem’s prayers did not cease.

Her whispered words felt like spiders crawling on my skin. My anger only crested as I translated her supplications, my heart swimming with guilt. *Why are you praying? We have been forgotten. The world is in the hands of monsters. No one cares. No one listens.*

I began twisting my shackles, if only to drown out her words, and grated my skin and didn’t stop until I felt the blood unpleasantly drying in my palms. Desperate tears of frustration soaked the blindfold, the clammy fabric sucking to my cheeks. A half-hearted sob escaped my lips.

“Meryem, why are you praying? No one is coming to help us—we’re *all alone*,” I snapped.

“Why did you do it?” The woman’s voice was calm. Indignation rose in me.

“Do what?”

“Your vandalism. Why did you do it?”

I rolled my jaw, considering her unexpected question.

*You thought you were being a clever little girl? The heroic street artist vigilante?*

A memory of shivering in bed, crying and clutching my mother's shawl, surfaced. The wind outside was cruel. It laughed and howled and mocked the little girl who had lost her mother and father.

"My parents were arrested for secretly teaching the Quran," I heard myself saying. I felt detached as I continued. "They were both sent to the re-education camps. I was left with my grandfather. I was stubborn. I was angry all the time—I didn't understand how they could have risked leaving me behind just to teach those words. For a long time, I blamed them."

I felt Meryem shift closer. "It took some time, but I realised my anger was misplaced. If my parents were willing to risk so much for those words, they must've meant something to them. So I began reminding myself, and reminding those who had taken them away—I graffitied and vandalized property with my artwork. Everytime they covered it, it only served to remind me how scared they were of those words. And I felt joy. I felt satisfaction that my parents had been people of bravery." My fingers unclenched. Some of the tension in my shoulders loosened.

"This world is full of hardships, but it is an ever greater test to bear with it patience. Don't think that Allah doesn't listen if you perceive what you think is silence." Meryem's knee nudged mine in the darkness. "You are like your parents, Arezou. You are brave. Before I was arrested, I saw your work, painted over and scratched, and I never thought I would meet the brave soul responsible. Or that she would be so young. To you, it may have brought satisfaction, but it brought peace to me, because it restored my hope that ease would soon come. It is not easy to have patience. Do not lose faith, Arezou. Allah is with us. *Inna ma'al usri yusraa.*"

Warmth flooded through my veins. To me the graffiti had been nothing but acts of my anger, outlets of my frustration; it had never occurred to me that others may have secretly admired it, may have been inspired by it.

I looped my legs through my shackled arms, bringing them forward. I winced in pain as the metal dug into my serrated flesh, hunting for the nub of chalk swindled in my clothes. My strained muscles protested as I crouched as close as I could to the wall behind my back. My split fingers traced the rough metal, lines forming in my mind. The chalk scraped in tune to my heartbeat.

The truck jostled, our chains rattling. Time spiraled away, losing its meaning among the lines coming together behind my eyes, among the rhythmic scratching. The nub shrunk, until my broken nails were screeching against the metal with every stroke.

The truck slowed, and stopped. Only dust remained on my fingertips. Footsteps. The trunk door flew open, the noises outside rushing in with the bitter bite of winter wind. The whining of other engines was distinct. *We're meeting with other trucks*, I realized with a jolt. I tried to decipher how many more trucks, how many more voices swirled outside. It was impossible.

“Lungs first,” the large man’s brittle voice came. I shrunk closer to the wall. He was standing right at the trunk door.

The clicking of a flashlight. Heavy boots clanging on metal, chains rattling. Dilnaz’s surprised cry. Shuffling feet, more chains. A thud outside.

A sudden, shattering noise. *A gunshot.*

Panic threatened to consume me as surprised screams rose from inside the truck. *Shot? Dilnaz? Dilnaz was shot?*

“*SILENCE!*” the officer roared, his baton slamming against the side of the truck. The clang shuddered through the wall at my back.

The fierce drumming of my blood drowned out the voices shouting outside. My brain comprehended very little. Names of a few surgical tools, I thought. Some doctors addressing each other. *Quick, quick.* They wanted to be quick, they kept saying. *Keep it cold, it needs to be fresh. Work quickly.*

I raised my shaking arms to my head, trying to work my fingers into the knot of my blindfold, but it was no use. Meryem’s prayers swirled in my mind, until I realised I was whispering them too.

“The heart. The heart is next,” the large man’s voice drifted in. The clanging footsteps returned, stopped right before me. There was a beat before a sharp pain erupted across my abdomen. I cried out, doubling over. Aggressive hands seized my arms and threw me to the brittle, wet grass. My blindfold was viciously torn off, the sudden light of the flashlight assaulting my eyes.

“What is the meaning of this? How did you manage this?” the officer demanded, waving angrily to the inside of the truck. I squinted my swollen eyes, seeing the words I’d marked for the first time. I could see Meryem’s lips still moving.

I turned my face to him unsteadily. Blood dripped from my chin. “*Inna ma’al usri yusraa.* Quran, ninety-fourth surah, sixth ayah—”

The baton swung for my face. Pain lanced through my nose, blood gushing. Spots burned at the edges of my vision.

“Do you think you’re still that street artist vigilante? This is still a game to you?” He yanked my hair, jerking my head. “Then you can watch.”

Dilnaz’s open body bled on a soaked stretcher. A large, ruptured cavity was where her chest should have been. Glistening innards shone sickeningly under the lights positioned above her. Five monsters wearing surgeon’s masks and bloody aprons milled near her lacerated carcass. One of them drew the zipper of a black bag over her body, sealing away the mutilated corpse.

I retched violently, my trembling fists slipping in the wet grass. Fear quivered in every part of my body, acrid nausea rolling in my scorching throat. The snow weeped under my palms. I couldn’t even cry.

The officer barked. Two other officers joined him and hoisted me up, yanking my arms back behind me. The dark barrel of a gun glowered before me. The cruel officer cocked the weapon.

I closed my eyes, willing my fear away, willing the frantic stampeding of my pulse to slow. *Inna ma’al usri yusraa*. The glorious words I’d written burned bright in my mind. The elegant curves and arches of the letters, the dips and lines I’d traced, unseeingly in the pitch.

That was faith, I realised.

*Allah is with us.*

My numb lips moved, my voice a breath first, then louder. “*Inna ma’al usri yusraa. Inna ma’al usri yusraa. INNA MA’AL USRI YUS—*”

The world splintered.

## References

- (<https://bylinetimes.com/>), B. T. (2019, December 04). More Uyghur Horror: Harvesting Hundreds of Thousands of Organs from Mass Murder. Retrieved from <https://bylinetimes.com/2019/11/26/more-uyghur-horror-harvesting-hundreds-of-thousands-of-organs-from-mass-murder/>
- Doffman, Z. (2019, November 19). China Killing Prisoners To Harvest Organs For Transplant: BMC Report Accuses China Of 'Falsifying' Data. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/11/16/china-covers-up-killing-of-prisoners-to-harvest-organs-for-transplant-new-report/#7296999e2ec7>
- Martin, W. (2019, September 25). China is harvesting thousands of human organs from its Uighur Muslim minority, UN human-rights body hears. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-harvesting-organs-of-uighur-muslims-china-tribunal-tells-un-2019-9>
- VICE News. (2019, June 29). *China's Vanishing Muslims: Undercover In The Most Dystopian Place In The World* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7AYyUqrMuQ>