

Silence by Lensa Mume

August 13, 2016

She takes off her shoes, placing them next to the door as she hangs her long coat. Holding her mail, she goes and sits on the couch, nervously. She calls her husband over. He sits down next to her and asks her what's up. She tells him about the mail and he gets nervous too. They open the envelope and pull out a piece of paper. They read and read until they are finished. They both were shocked and fearful of what they just read. She was going to be detained at a concentration camp as a teacher to teach prisoners about Chinese culture and she didn't have a choice in the matter. She couldn't speak and neither could her husband. Thoughts rushed through her head. *What will happen to my children, my home, and my parents?* Her husband held her tight in his arms as she broke down. She was scared, not only for herself but for her family as well...

November 6th, 2016

Patigul was missing her children and husband. She was very lonely. Her children and husband left for Turkey in early October. The house was still and quiet now. She had been sending them money and a couple of other things to be prepared for when she is leaving the country. She made sure to send almost all the money to them so none of it went to waste. She loved her house but she knew she couldn't stay here long after the camp...

Jan 1st, 2017

Patigul is on a bus with many other Uyghurs being taken to the camps. She is nervous and worried about what will happen. She wonders if she will be safe and if the environment will be good. She looks around and sees many people with sad faces. She couldn't help herself now and neither could the strangers on the bus. They were all being taken to a place that wasn't their home. Patigul hopes that everyone will be provided with a comfortable place to sleep and be provided food that will help them survive. She knew something was wrong and feared something bad would happen to them. It was too late now...

... Patigul was taken by the authorities to a room where she was made to sign a piece of paper saying she promises to teach her fellow inmates, under penalty of death for failing to comply. Then she gets taken to a tiny bedroom that has cameras in every corner and one in the middle. She knew she had it better than the other inmates, although she had to sleep on a thin mattress on concrete. She kept quiet so she wouldn't be punished. She watched from her room as twenty other females were led to a room by the guards. A 50ft by 50ft room that they all had to live in. They were provided with a single bucket for a toilet. Patigul was disgusted but she couldn't do anything. The guards tell them they must confess sin when told to do so, they must sleep on their right side, and they can not laugh, talk, cry, or answer questions. If they do not follow the rules they face punishment. They will be taken to the black room for their punishment. As she walked up to her room door, she saw an elderly woman with skin that was flared off and nails that were pulled out walk into the room with twenty other females. Patigul was horrified. *How could they do this to an elderly woman?* She backed away from her room door thinking about every little mistake she or others may make and what might happen. She sat on her bed and waited for the guards to give further instructions.

The door to her room opens and a guard yells at her, "Get up, it's time to teach."

Patigul gets up with fear and walks over to the guard and follows him to a room where she is supposed to teach the inmates the Chinese language, culture, and traditions. She sees that the inmates are handcuffed. Patigul is forced to teach the inmates Chinese and rehearse propaganda songs, and repeat political slogans praising the Communist party. If they didn't do this they would face extreme punishment. Patigul felt very uncomfortable and she could see the inmates were uncomfortable as well. After a couple of hours of teaching, they were taken to go eat lunch. They were given soup and bread. When they were done eating they were told to confess their sins. The sins were related to not knowing the Chinese language and cultural traditions. If you didn't confess a sin quickly you would be taken to the black room. Everyone passed, but it was very close. When they were finished, the inmates had to face the wall, raise their hands, and think about their sins. Patigul worried that she would fail. Her arms got tired, but she kept them up. She didn't want to face punishment, especially after seeing the elderly woman...

May 21st, 2018

Patigul sat on the couch watching TV after eating breakfast. She was startled by the doorbell ringing. She got up and walked to the door. *Who could it be?* She opened the door slowly and saw a mailman standing at the door with an envelope. He handed it to her. "Thank you," said Patigul and shut the door. She opened the envelope and saw it was from the same people who sent her an envelope a couple of months ago. It said she would be going back to the camp and be thrown into the general population as a prisoner for 3 years. Patigul was sick to her stomach and horrified. *3 Years!!* She knew what the inmates went through when she was there and could not imagine a longer period of agony. She knew she couldn't go back, especially as a prisoner. She was convinced she would die if she was sent back. She decided it was time to flee the country and it was time to join her family. She put on a coat and her shoes. She grabbed some water and a few other things and left her home, never to come back. Patigul walked hurriedly and ran and ran until the sun rose. She was tired but she had to keep going. She had to escape this nightmare and be with her family. She was trying to get to the Kazakhstan border to be free from China. She got closer as each day passed but her legs were killing her. She didn't stop knowing she was close to the border. She was exhausted, hungry, tired, and dehydrated, however, there was no time to think about that. She was focused on getting to that border. As she came closer to the border, she was careful with her steps. She hid behind trees and bushes making sure to not make any noise. She decided to sit behind a large bush and prepare herself to cross the border. She drank the water she carried and saved during her journey and ate some almonds. This was all she brought that night as she wanted to travel lightly. She didn't eat and drink most days because she wanted to save her rations. When she finished the bottle of water, she looked around and decided it was time to move closer. There was only one small bush in front of her, and the rest was plain and open land. She put her head down and ran quickly to the bush. As she nervously looked around once more, she decided this was the time to sprint to the border. She heard footsteps and gunshots behind her as she ran. She used all her energy and courage to run forward towards the border. As she jumped the fence, a loud sound was heard BOOM!!! She was shot. The soldier had shot Patigul in the arm. Patigul fell on the other side of the border and held her injured and bleeding arm. She didn't let a sound escape her mouth. She felt the sharp pain in her arm and felt blood begin to

seep down her arm. She panicked as she saw the amount of blood on her hand, from touching her shot arm. She tried to crawl more into Kazakhstan before she passed out...

May 22nd, 2018

Patigul put on her clothes and took her belongings. She thanked the nurse that took care of her as she left the hospital. She went to the bank to exchange her money for the Tenge. She went outside and called for a taxi. When she got one she told the taxi driver to take her to the airport. The driver drove her and she gave him the money she exchanged earlier when they got to the airport. She talked to the airport agents and got on the plane with the ticket her husband sent her. She excitedly boarded the plane feeling free for the first time and she arrived in Turkey after a couple of hours. Her husband and children were at the airport waiting for her. When they saw each other they ran and hugged each other tightly and she didn't want to leave the giant hug and love surrounding her. They hugged for a long time. They were all crying tears of pure joy. They were grateful they were united at last. Patigul hadn't experienced this special joy in over a year.

She was so thrilled, beyond words. She hugged and kissed each of her children over and over. When she was done, she and Emin hugged for a long time before they parted. Patigul smiled and they walked out of the airport to the car and drove to their new home. The camp was still on her mind and she worried about others there. She was so glad she was far away from it. When they arrived home, she sighed and was greatly relieved to really be home with her family. Her new home was a safe haven and her family being together was the best feeling in the world for her. She made sure to spend time she had missed with her children and to reassure them they were a family once again...