

Here comes that feeling *again!*



My niece, Mariam, holding her favorite teddy bear.

It has been four months since I last visited. I miss the scent of agar-wood burning around the house. I miss the smell of our backyard and the loud cackling noises our chickens make at first light. I miss the naughtiness of my youngest niece. When she jokingly covers my eyes with her little hands and I pretend I don't know who it is. I guess her sister's name and she laughs in a silly manner. I miss her crooked teeth that frames her innocent smile and the smell of her long curly hair. I cannot hide that she is my favorite, it shows from the way I spoil her with gifts and secretly give her chocolate when her mother repeatedly says "no". I miss the warmth of my own bed. I miss home.

It is the 10th of December and I am finally coming home for winter break. During winter, our family usually has a routine to follow. As we reach the end of November and the weather is bearable, we clean up our patio and open up our tent in the backyard, bring out our Mediterranean furniture and place them in an L-shaped position facing the tent. An option for guests who prefer an airy seating area.

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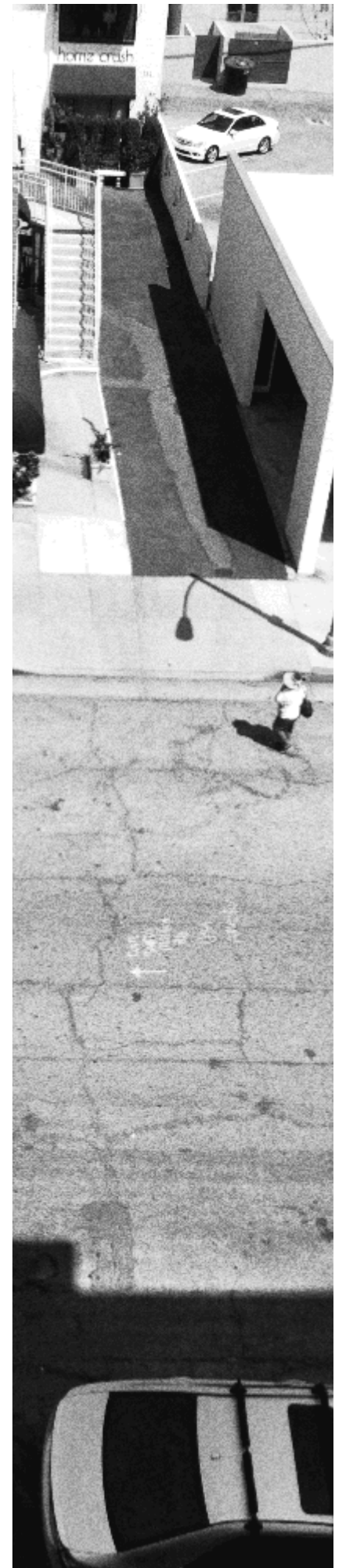
The Middle East is known for its extreme heat in the summer, especially in the Gulf states. However, in Qatar what a joy it is when winter comes along. The cold wind will penetrate your bones and yet, you enjoy every moment.

As the sun sets, my family and I prepare for the Maghrib prayer (the fourth of the five formal prayers after sunset preformed by Muslims). We have a separate quiet room for prayer, lined with a wine red carpet. My

four sisters would wear their prayer garments (a long dress that covers the woman from head to toe), sit on the floor and whisper a prayer or two. My mother and I would set a small table with water and dates then join them. The room is very quiet, you would hear nothing but faint whispers. I miss this beautiful feeling of peace and tranquility. After prayer I would rush out in a hurry to get changed and prepare the tent for guests. Arab families have guests almost everyday. This is just how it is here. Each of the sisters will be given a job to do. One will be in charge of dessert, one will take care of dinner, one has to make sure the drinks are fresh and ready, another will make sure the tent is clean and presentable. This is my job. Even though the weather has cooled it is still a bit dusty.

The guests arrive at 7:20 pm exactly. I remember this because I got a text the exact moment one of the guests came to greet me. There were about five guests, all sitting outside the tent. Two of them came with children, and one bought a tray with different types of sandwiches. All handmade from the looks of it. Many would buy them ready-made, but she enjoys cooking. There is something about the smell of food made with love. It is fresh, the bread looks warm as newly baked bread and the smell does not feel stale. I walked across the patio and left the tray on one of the tables. I catch a glimpse of my cat's tale from behind. I wanted to go and pat her but then realise she would disturb the guests.

Arabs are loud. Every Arab family will agree to this unpleasant fact. Everyone is talking about a different topic, but each one has a particular thing in common; a smile on their face. Laughter fills the air and their voices echoing with the wind is what I miss the most. I hear my mother shout out "bring the tea Maryam" or "pour her some more coffee" and she continues her political conversation about what's happening in Aleppo. I remember reading tweets about it, but did not give it any thought at that moment. I wanted to enjoy the company. As the weather got colder we brought out the wood burning fire pit. Placed it in the center and sat around it. The fire pit table was about 33 inches in width and nearly 18 inches in height. I love the smell of wood burning and the warm feeling I get when I am close to it. The rich oakly smell and how wisps of silver smoke dance their way through the air. I looked to the other side and saw my mother, and how the light and shadows painted her face. I thought to myself, how happy and lucky I am for me to see such sight. As one will always miss their mother, no matter how old they have become. Being apart from her those few months made me realise how much



Streets of Doha, my home town.

love I had for her and no matter how much I think I've grown, I will always need her.

We continue to chat as time passes by. It's 8:45 pm and dinner is served on a large dining table. The food looks fresh and smells wonderful. A smell alone can take you places and let you remember moments you think you have forgotten. We sat around the table, passing plates here and there for all to enjoy the deliciously cooked, mouth-watering meal. After dinner, we all returned back to the tent. My sisters, two of the guests and I decided to play a game of cards.

We all got our tea ready and sat in a circle. My sister mixed the cards as I was sipping some of my tea. Overlapping voices filled the tent, people smiling, some shouting and one child was crying because he wanted ice-cream. His mother refused because of the cold weather. He insisted, but then she ignored and went to finish her conversation with my older sister.

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It was time for them to leave now, 10:45 pm. That is not considered later for Arabs. Some stay passed midnight. We kissed each other on the cheeks and said our goodbyes. I stuck my tongue out at one of the children and she laughed while her mother pulled her by the arm. It was getting quiet. My mother left the tent and went inside the house. Before she neared the stairs, she shouted “Duha don't forget to turn off all the lights!” As she knows I am the only one capable of doing so. The rest forget or simply do not care. The voices in the air slowly started to disappear and it was dead silent. I looked over to the chair next to the fire pit and saw my cat. I walked up to her, happy to see her. I bend down and stroke her head. I miss her. I sat outside for a while and then went into the house. My sisters have all gone upstairs and of course, none of them turned off the lights. I headed to the kitchen to check if there was any dessert left, sadly it was all devoured. I turned off the lights and headed to my room with a glass of hot milk. I read 30 pages of my favorite book “And the mountains echoed” by Khaled Hosseini and lay there in bed thinking of how much I am going to miss this when I leave again.



My niece, playing with a vintage camera from my collection.

**“WE DON'T CALL IT
HOMESICK.
WE CALL IT MISSING
HOME.
THERE IS NOT A SICKNESS
INVOLVED,
IT IS A STATE OF MIND.”**

JOHN LITTEN