

Fasting

I loved the Lenten foods Grandmother prepared: salads of purslane, pepper and slivered egg, round meatless lentil "keufteh" topped with onion cooked in olive oil until translucent, limp. "Lent" the time of deprivation, was in remembrance of Christ's forty days of trial. And it was part of growing up. Where did it go? Grandmother always fasted but told us children to eat, eat the Lenten foods. Nowadays most Armenians fast only on April 24th for other grandmothers forced to march and starve. For the young women raped and nailed to crosses row on row. For Armenian soldiers drafted then shot by Turks. For Armenians burned in churches as they prayed. For the butchered, hungry and those driven mad, and for the drowned, -- we do not eat on April 24th. But Grandmother would say, "No. Breaking bread in the name of the lost is the best way to salute life."

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My Inheritance

Looking back at my father's life: a village boy sent to a small city's French college, then to a Michigan agricultural university, I wonder how he learned six languages, every philosopher, how to order wines.

He could quote from so many poets;
and knew not only names of heads of state
but knew them personally.

A fantastic memory helped.
But how did he become so urbane? Yet we
treated each other as aliens. He thought I was
an idiot. (Didn't he tell me once to stay out of
politics?) And if I thought, if I thought of him at
all, it was as someone to whom I was invisible,
someone obsessed with Armenian case and cause.

Looking back at my father's life, which
I did not share...I see him, leading his fedayis¹.
I picture him in hills and mountains I never saw.
And I see him on stage surrounded by applause.
Wherever we went he exuded the sense that
there was nothing impossible, nowhere not
open to us. He was so much at ease, so much
at home it was a surprise, no, a shock
after he died, that I inherited the homesickness
and exile's sorrow he had never shown.

- Diana Der-Hovanesian

¹ freedom fighters