



Midnight Ramen Runs Rosemary Yang

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Instant ramen is, arguably, the most useful invention of the 20th century. Quick and easy, it works for early mornings and late nights, for everyone and everything. It brings a sense of home, storing stories within the broth and memories among the noodles, a little pocket of history.

For my dad, instant ramen is the coffee fuel of his mornings and the rice energy of his evenings, the craving healing from the inside out. He revels in it, tasting the echo of his junior years and the tears of his college years. It's transcendental.

Maybe it's just the monosodium glutamate.

Regardless, MSGs or no, instant ramen is best for quick, dirty, no-time-to-eat study sessions. Essentially, college in a nutshell. And amongst the four years of frantic cramming, boiling, and downing instant ramen, habit seeps in among the MSG-filled broth and settles comfortably in the veins, carving its place into bone, and waiting.

Decades later, cravings come and go on the regular, and midnight always heralds an instinct to reach for the boiling water and instant noodles. It's magical stuff, honestly. Holds power most other things don't have — we could really learn a thing or two.

But these noodles, to him, are the fuel to his self-made man of a machine, made in China (no pun intended), brought to America, and molded into his American dream. They hold his story.

His American dream looks a little like this: a foundation built from a PhD in biology, padded walls of Coke and midlife luxuries, and topped with a chimney of stock market jumps. Inside, there is a happy wife and a happy life, as they say. Good, comfortable stuff.

My own American dream is much like his: go up, earn money, and be comfortable. It is also unlike his: go up, get judged, work harder, and get judged harder — while Dad struggled with the new, unknown path, I hike among the shallow, tangled bushes.

I first became aware that I was Asian in fourth grade. Growing up among the black and white books of the curriculum, I was able to experience everyone and everything. I was able to dream with *The Poet X*; I was able to fly in the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter*; I was able to cry with *The Raisin in the Sun*.

Honestly, I was happy. The worlds presented to me were not boring worlds; they were not flat worlds. They were beautiful worlds, but they were terribly, terribly monotone — black, white, and occasionally an eye-popping shade of Hispanic brown. The rest of the colors, the rest of us, were left on the cover, shallow and unsubstantial.

There was a time, once, when we stumbled across a story imbued with Chinese heritage. Reading it out loud was, quite frankly, very, very hard. It was like forcing a square block through a round hole, and then some. With Hispanic stories, the romance language flows between the lips.



With American stories, the familiar names sit comfortably behind our teeth. With Chinese stories, the strange language trips, tumbles, and falls flat past the tongue.

The *exoticness* of the named identity, of me, was too much. Too much unfamiliarity, too little exposure. In class, it was just that. None of me in the stories, none of my family in the white picket fences. In the bigger world, it is the path of shrubs I hike through, rooted in shallow stereotypes, reaching out to each other for the “one nation under God, indivisible.”

We are indivisible, yes; disconnected, no.

As I began seeing beautiful, mellow sunshine yellows, yellows that seep beyond the cover, I forget. I forget that people still see colors in shades of grey, still quarantine harsh, bright, lemon yellows on covers while maintaining the pristine white pages.

Pages and pages of artificial lemon flavors coat the Internet, dyeing entire websites a sickly yellow. It perpetuates a shallow, flat perception of an Asian dream, where tiger mothers beat children with sticks to create doctors and surgeons, and lawyers. This yellow fever leaks into white pages, finally adding a color, only to dye it an ugly lemon yellow.

It happens a little too often. I catch a whiff of lemon in the hallways, I recognize it at introductory meetings, I tear up from its sheer *sourness* at family dinners. I smell lemon, whether I want to or not, everywhere I go.

For instance, at a tutoring session. I was looking for a tutor, as some lost children do, for college preparations. We were waiting, my mother and I, for a prospective tutor when a young, vibrant lady walks in, and introduces herself without a hint of an accent in her voice. Introductions go well; she smiles with a little too much teeth, talks without *exoticness*, but is bright and lovely.

Of course, as per every conference, Mom asks about easy majors for girls. The tutor hesitates, looks a little strangely at her, and stares like she doesn't understand.

Mom tries again. “The majors for girls that are easier for college,” she clarifies. The tutor stares some more. Understanding clicks in her eyes.

“I think,” she starts, “She should choose what she’s passionate about.”

What a textbook answer. Passion.

She nods again. “She should follow her passion,” she repeats.

Mom shifts a little, defensive. “What about common majors for girls? Majors that are easy to get into.”

The tutor hesitates. “Passion is the most important,” she says again.

I stare, incredulous. It’s starting to sound like propaganda — passion this, passion that. Except that’s a Chinese, *communist*, thing. Sorry. I forgot.

Besides, the implications are insulting. My mother takes my own interests first, allows my freedom for many things. Jumping and burning that bridge before reaching the conclusion is simply slapping a label on a person and calling it a day.

I swallow sour, bitter lemons before they escape and splatter the room yellow.



Yet I am not tragically Asian; I am not tragically labeled. I have always carried my lemons neatly in a bag on my back, never spilling, never dropping. Contained, they are easy to deal with — they do not impede my flight.

Dad, whenever approached with instant ramen and the stock market, always lectured about big money and small money. We are small money. Wall Street is big money. *Assholes* are big money, but we ride the tide and reap the harvest, waiting and sharpening our oyster knives while big money plays the game.

The world is our oyster, when the oysters open. Dive in, do not look back. For the immigrant generation prepared the boats, the previous generation has crafted the knives, and my generation — my generation will reap the harvest.

I am living my American dream, too busy sharpening my oyster knife to open the contents of the bag behind me and weep. I am living right here, right now, eating my instant noodles and looking for the telltale sign of gull wings, oyster knife at the hip. Big money may crash the ocean waves, mold the education system, send a tsunami my way, and I will ride the waves and harvest the oysters. I will not drown.

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