

THE
VINE
BASKET

JOSANNE LA VALLEY



CLARION BOOKS

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Summary: Life has been hard for fourteen-year-old Mehrigul, a member of the Uyghur tribal group scorned by the Chinese communist regime, so when an American offers to buy all the baskets she can make in three weeks, Mehrigul strives for a better future for herself and her family despite her father's opposition.

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*To the Uyghur people of East Turkestan
in their struggle to preserve their language, culture, and religion
and to live freely in their own land*



Uyghur is pronounced *WEEgur*.

Mehrigul feels trapped. She wants to go to school but must stay home to help out on the family farm. Her brother, who used to share this burden, is gone. Uyghur girls in their teens who aren't in school can be sent to work in factories in the south of China, and Mehrigul knows she is being eyed by government officials with a quota to fill. Whether she is sent away or tied to farm work, her future looks bleak.

And then . . . a ray of hope. A basket Mehrigul wove in a happy moment has attracted the attention of a woman who has a store in America. If Mehrigul can make more baskets and sell them, perhaps she can help her family and open new possibilities for herself. The woman will come back in three weeks to see what she has made.

Mehrigul is eager to begin, but one obstacle after another blocks her path. Her scornful father, who betrays her; her mother, lethargic and withdrawn, unable to help; a blistering sandstorm; injured hands. Mehrigul is torn between duty to her family and pursuit of a hope that recedes day by day.

How Mehrigul takes a hand in shaping her own destiny is at the heart of a story that celebrates creativity, determination, and dreams.

JOSANNE LA VALLEY worked in arts management and as a professional musician before she turned to writing.

The Vine Basket marks her publishing debut.

She wrote this novel following a trip to northwest China to visit local craftsmen in Hotan and the surrounding countryside. "What I remember most," she says, "is a young Uyghur girl who offered me a peach from her family's orchard as I stood watching her grandfather weave a willow basket in the front yard of their home." Later she learned that Uyghur girls were being forced to leave their families to work in Chinese factories, and she became eager to share information about the Uyghurs and their homeland. "This was a story I wanted to tell."

Josanne lives with her husband in New York City.

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GOING TO SCHOOL had been Mehriqul's hope and joy. If she studied hard, spoke perfect Mandarin, maybe she could get a job at the museum in Hotan. That was her dream. Mehriqul wanted to be the person telling visitors that her Uyghur ancestors had been here greeting people during the golden age of the old Silk Road.

That dream was beyond her reach now. But a new dream stirred in her, one that brought fear as well as pleasure. There was something she wanted more desperately as each day passed—to make another basket worthy of Mrs. Chazen's attention.

For the next three weeks Mehriqul would allow herself only that one thought. No matter what happened after, she'd have this special moment in time.

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