

> During my father's time, some 60,000 men were imprisoned here, and many of them were killed. The prison is in the middle of a dusty field, and if you look out, you see huge mounds, possibly from mass graves.

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> It's so hard to imagine my father surviving in that prison, because he's such a gentle man. He'll chase an ant around the room and take it outside rather than kill it. He was never tortured, but two of his friends were beaten so badly that they couldn't walk, and he had to watch them drag their bodies from place to place.

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> A heavy energy rested inside of me as soon as I arrived there, and it hasn't quite left. I think there are thousands of ghosts in and around Pul-i-Charki seeking justice or peace.

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> November 28, 2002

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> Two nights ago we went to my father's uncle's daughter's house for dinner. I'm learning an entirely new vocabulary for family members that extend beyond cousins. Many people here marry their cousins because they want keep their daughters and sons within the extended family.

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> Arzo is from Jaji, and she is to marry her cousin. In many Afghan villages, if you want to marry your cousin, and you are a man, all you have to do is go to the courtyard, fire your rifle a few times, say the woman's name, and you are to become her husband. No one else can marry that cousin, and if anyone challenges you, a duel date is set and one person dies.

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> Arzo is 19, and when she was 16, her cousin shot off his rifle and declared her to be his wife. The problem is he is much older than she is, already married, and has five children. Her choices are limited: Marry the cousin and become his second wife, or remain single the rest of her life. She has been taking the Afghan version of Prozac for years. For one year, she wouldn't get out of bed, and she fainted often. Her parents don't know what to do. Family ties run deep, and if the family disobeyed this tradition, it could be blacklisted and its other children would have a hard time finding spouses.

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> When I see the women here -- especially those in my own family, who are limited to the house and have all of their decisions made by brothers, husbands, sons, mullahs, the local leaders -- I am grateful for being an outsider, for being able to walk down a street alone, buy my own clothes, choose where I live and refuse to marry my cousins without too many consequences.

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> December 9, 2002

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> Gray skies, cold mornings and no snooze button. I woke up cold and walked over to the heater -- a diesel stove. I took off the fuel tank, walked out to the hallway where the diesel fuel is kept and filled the tank, trying not to pour the fuel all over the floor. Back in the room, clip on the tank, turn the valve full blast for a few seconds then down to a trickle. I light a tissue and drop it into the stove and watch as it erupts into flames and smoke. A fat metal pipe carries the smoke out through a round hole in the wall. I sit in front of the flames wondering if long-term exposure to the fumes will cause some type of cancer. What are the chances of it exploding? Will I ever be warm again? Am I starting to sound like a spoiled brat?

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