

> One nurse came over and said, "Who the hell do you think you are? Watch and see how I get you out of here."

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> I said, "I'm the daughter of a minister, and I'm not leaving this room. Do you understand?"

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> Life in Afghanistan revolves around who you know, how important you are and how much money you have for bribes. It was no different in the hospital. I had no regrets about using my father's position.

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> Once they knew who I was, their tone changed with us, but not with any of the other women. No matter how much they cried out in pain, they were ignored or insulted, told to shut up, told that they weren't the only patients in the hospital. The most abusive were the old cleaning women, especially a short thin woman who guarded the door like a pit bull. More than anything I wanted to smash her face in.

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> After 10 hours of labor, Jamala was carted into the delivery room while I waited outside with Sackina. As I stood leaning against the wall, I watched a woman carry the tiny body of her grandson, wrapped in a checkered blue cloth, back and forth, looking for her daughter to show her the dead infant. I had never been that close to death.

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> It only took Jamala half an hour to give birth to a girl. Then we were taken to a small private room, and two doctors came in to check on us several times. During the night I left the hospital three times to get food and supplies, and each time I argued with the pit bull lady at the front door.

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> Jamala and the baby were released at 11 this morning, and I came home to take a long bath and a nap. I can't stop thinking about the hospital. So far I have taken in and absorbed everything I have seen in Afghanistan, finding peace or justification for it, but this experience has left me defeated, devastated.

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> January 31, 2003

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> The other day I saw one of my students, Qasim, on his bike making a left turn. I recognized his gray coat. My heart went out to him, a man in his fifties with gray hair and small gaps between his teeth, the director of his department at the Ministry of Public Works, riding his bike in the rain and snow as I sat in the back seat of a white 4x4, the heat on full blast. At home I told my mother about it, and she said that my heart was too soft and I felt sorry for everyone.

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> That day I had been driving around looking to find a good deal on hardbound notebooks for my students as a going-away gift, and I stopped at the bakery to buy them cakes and bread.

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> I went to class early, and three of my students were already there so they helped cut the cake and bread, and they helped me put the notebooks on everyone's chairs along with pens my father had brought from America. I told them my mother and sister were also going to visit because I had talked so much about them that my mother wanted to meet them.

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> After my mother and sister arrived, we sat in a circle and my students began telling my mother how much they had appreciated my teaching. As they spoke, tears rolled down my face. They gave me a box with a beautiful silver ring with a jade-colored stone with matching necklace, bracelet and earrings.