

> I know I can't stay away from Afghanistan -- it is too deeply etched in my heart. But my family and closest friends, and simple sweet indulgences like yoga classes, dark chocolate truffles, and a nice pair of fitted jeans, will always bring me back here.

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> March 31, 2003

> During my four months in Kabul, I saw women in blue burqas holding their babies in one hand and begging for money with the other; men and children with missing arms and legs, and scarred faces; a bloody infant gasp for air in between its mother's thighs; a 12-year-old girl huddled in pain after her wedding night -- all of these people trapped inside a dry, dusty, war-ravaged country. It hurt to see them -- sick, poor, helpless people. My people, but I didn't know them intimately, and I could walk away from their pain. I was an observer passing through their world.

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> But now I understand what it means to be in pain, to be desperate and alone, drowning in sorrow, having no way out. I don't know if my father is alive or dead, but he's not in Kabul where he was supposed to be, where I was supposed to return to him next month. He may be at the bottom of the ocean stuck in a crevice; he may be on a smuggling boat being held for ransom; he may be in Heaven.

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> Thirty-four days have passed since his plane crashed into the Arabian Sea, and my father, Joma Mohammad Mohamadi, the minister of mines and industry, was declared dead. How can I accept his death without a body? Can the ocean swallow a man whole and leave no trace of him?

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> It happened on a clear, sunny Monday morning about 50 miles out from Karachi airport in Pakistan. Onboard, there were two pilots, a Chinese businessman, my father and four other Afghan officials. We still don't know the cause of the crash. Was it an accident or sabotage? The Pakistan navy is in charge of the search and rescue, and so far it has found the plane wreckage, two flares that were fired off after the plane hit the water and six bodies. My father and the Chinese businessman were not among them.

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> All I know is that my father and his top advisers were in Pakistan signing the final agreements for a \$2.5 billion gas pipeline to be built across Afghanistan, a lucrative project that many people wanted a piece of. But my father wouldn't sell out, and my brother once cautioned him, "You'll be lucky if they give you a warning." But he wouldn't listen.

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> On the phone, President Karzai told me he'd do everything in his power to find my father, "the flower of his cabinet," he said. But then days later he wanted to hold a day of mourning and wish my father eternal happiness. Sometimes I feel like a delusional daughter who can't come to grips with her father's death and President Karzai is right to say that we should move on. I could do that if I thought my father was anything but a survivor, an exceptional man who risked his life for his people and patiently and gracefully worked against thugs and warlords to move his projects forward.

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> Mostly I feel betrayed by the reaction of the Afghan government, especially the president, because they have done nothing in the way of leading a search or joining the investigation, and their apathy evokes anger, suspicion and sorrow within me. My hopes for Afghanistan are slowly dying.

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> In the Afghan people, I found love and beauty and hope, and I couldn't imagine being anywhere but with them. But it was always by my father's side, doing all these things as his daughter, taking pride in his name and his work. And now he is lost, and I'm crippled without him.

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> My students from Kabul call every week to offer their sympathies and gently remind me that I promised to return. I don't know what to tell them. Nothing hurts more than looking at my mother, her face long and sad, white streaks grown in over her auburn hair, pools of tears welling up in her eyes every time she looks at me. She doesn't know if we are the fortunate or unfortunate family. Would it be better to be grieving over a gravestone right now or be trapped where we are -- the not knowing -- stuck somewhere between madness and hope? I imagine this is how my people have felt most of their lives, and now I am no different.