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The Faithful Scribe: A Story of Islam, Pakistan, Family, and War

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THE
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A STORY OF ISLAM,
PAKISTAN, FAMILY, AND WAR

Shahan Mufti

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Author's Note: This book is entirely a work of nonfiction based on real events. I have drawn facts from my own memory, my reporting of events, which occasionally relied on memories of others about events in their own lives, or their memory of the memories relayed by others.

I have also used works of written history that have been recorded, over many eras, by recognized historians from around the world. In all cases, I have strived to be as accurate as possible in portraying events and characters of the past and present.

Home



IF WE MEET at a party in New York you might ask me where I'm from. People usually end up asking me that. It's not that I'm very exotic looking. I am average height, slim, and I have ambiguously brown skin. I wear those dark-framed glasses that are pervasive in the legions of writers and journalists who find their way into this city, and I have plentiful facial hair that swells and recedes depending on the number of deadlines I am juggling. None of this makes me stand out terribly in New York. This is a city where the trains are filled with people from all countries of the world, each person with his own surprising story. That's one of the things I love most about being here. What might make you wonder about me is my language, specifically, the way in which I use and pronounce words. At first my American-accented English sounds perfectly natural. You will likely assume that I am American, and you will be right. I am American, and so you might judge it impertinent to

explore my ethnic background. But in the flow of conversation, I might use a word—"supper" instead of "dinner" maybe—that pricks your ears as unusual. Or I might just launch, with passion, into a monologue about the sport of cricket. Then, spotting the lull in conversation, you may finally lean in and, over the pleasing din of courteous conversation, ask, "So, where are you from?"

"Pakistan," I will reply. "Well, my parents were both born in Pakistan." I was born in the American Midwest, but I have shuttled back and forth between America and Pakistan for my entire life. A year here, four years there, five months here, two weeks there; if I sit down to count it all, I might discover that I have split my time equally in the two countries down to the exact number of months. I'll tell you, "I'm 100 percent American and 100 percent Pakistani." It's true. Both countries and cultures are equally home to me. You might ask me where in Pakistan my family is from. I would tell you Lahore, and explain that it is the heart of the region in Pakistan known as the Punjab. I speak Urdu and Punjabi just as well as I speak English. For this reason, working as a reporter in Pakistan has been easier for me than it is for most other American journalists. And no, no one in Pakistan would think I'm from anywhere other than Pakistan.

I know that in your mind you linger on that word: Pakistan. No matter where you've been for the past decade, you've probably heard of this place, and often. You probably recognize the word well. It's a pop of a gunshot in the room. "Pakistan!" During the past few years you have been bombarded with information, images, ideas about this country,

much more than you can recollect at this moment. But there are basic impressions: it is next to Afghanistan; it is next to India; it's Muslim; it has nuclear bombs, many nuclear bombs; it's the place where a man named Osama bin Laden was finally found. Whatever specific details you can recall are probably more or less accurate. So while I speak, you will be thinking of that Pakistan. But I also am thinking, as I speak to you, about the place that you picture in your mind—and to me it looks like a caricature, a dark parody.

Later in the evening, we might find ourselves together again, a group of common friends sitting around a coffee table loaded with empty glasses and half-eaten hors d'oeuvres. More comfortable and familiar, the conversation might flow more freely now and more honestly. Why is Pakistan such a mess? It's a fair question, but unless you have a few days to talk about this, I will try to point to the kernel of the problem. Pakistan is a unique country, and so it has unique problems. In August 1947, months before the state of Israel was created as a refuge for a nation of Jewish people, Pakistan came on the map as a home for all the Muslims scattered over South Asia. These Muslims were from dozens of different races and ethnicities and they spoke dozens of different languages and dialects. The one hundred million Muslims living in South Asia in 1947 made up more than a quarter of the world's Muslim population. Millions of Muslims packed up the stuff of their lives and migrated to this new state that hot summer, and Pakistan became the world's largest Muslim country at the time.

It was a remarkable new state. Most other Muslim countries that had won independence from European colonial

rule during the twentieth century came to be ruled by kings or emperors or emirs. But Pakistan, emulating countries in Europe and America, aspired to become a constitutional democracy. Turkey was another Muslim-majority country that was formed as a constitutional republic after the First World War, and it self-consciously modeled itself after European countries as a staunchly secular state. But in Pakistan's case there was an important and fateful twist: Pakistan strove to incorporate Islam into its constitutional democracy.

The first Pakistani constitution declared the country a "democratic state" that would be guided by "principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam." While in one passage it stated that "the Muslims of Pakistan should be enabled individually and collectively to order their lives in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam," in the next it promised "adequate provision" for minorities "freely to profess and practice their religion and develop their culture." The first article of the constitution gave the country a name: "Islamic Republic of Pakistan." It was the world's first Islamic democracy. President Harry Truman of the United States wrote a letter to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founding father, to tell him that the new country "embarks on its course with the firm friendship and good will of the United States of America." There had never been a constitution quite like Pakistan's before, and there has never really been a state like it ever since. This unique birth, I will suggest to you, is really when Pakistan's troubles began.

It had to be this way. The country was to be home to millions of people who did not share one language or ethnicity and sometimes engaged in vastly different cultural practices. The people of Pakistan did share a common religious identity; they were nearly all Muslim. And so it was hoped that despite all differences, this common Islamic identity would seal the nation. From the very beginning, people doubted that such a nation could ever work, and it was always going to be a tough challenge for a young state. Pakistan's experiment in Islam has been afflicted from the very beginning; the country's military has consistently disrupted democratic evolution, and the people's chosen representatives have failed, again and again, to live up to their promises. But the truth is that conditions outside the country never really helped, either. Pakistan sits right at the crossroads of the Middle East and South, Central, and East Asia. Just consider Pakistan's neighbors: China is to the northeast; India lines the eastern border; Afghanistan and Iran are to the west; the Persian Gulf nibbles on the southern coastline. It's a tough and volatile neighborhood.

And then, of course, there's America. It's very far away, but for better or for worse, America has been there at every tortuous twist and turn in Pakistan's modern history. Other countries in the world might be able to draw an imaginary line in time between the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the War on Terror, but for Pakistan, America's first global war bled fluidly into the next. The Cold War finished in Afghanistan and the War on Terror began there, and both times America chose to fight its war through Pakistan. America and Pakistan, my two countries,

have been locked in a tormented embrace for my entire life and ever since Pakistan became an independent state. This nearly perpetual state of international war has taken its toll on Pakistan, but it's not all America's fault. To blame America would be a lazy explanation for the deep problems of a complex country.

I am a journalist and I have covered this latest global war from the front lines in Pakistan, and people sometimes ask me about the violence I have witnessed. Many thousands of people have died in Pakistan. Many have died by the bombs dropped from the robotic airplanes, called drones, which the CIA flies remotely over villages and towns in Pakistan's northwest. But the great majority of Pakistanis have violently died at the hands of other Pakistanis. Why are Americans bombing Pakistani villages? Why are Pakistanis murdering each other in extraordinary numbers? This violence is difficult to explain. All violence, I find, is difficult to explain. To be honest, I do not fully understand the reasons why people take each other's lives, but I have seen plenty of violence and so I know that there cannot be a singular, easy reason to explain every life lost.

I could try to describe the violence to you. I could try my best to explain how sizzling slabs of human flesh tend to cling to the walls or hang limply and quietly from tree branches after a bomb has ripped through a bustling marketplace with deadly ease. I could describe the trajectory along which a suicide bomber's limbs tend to scatter and what that might tell us about the kinds of explosives he is using. But you probably don't want to hear all this right now, and I don't like talking about this much either. So I will sanitize this talk of violence.

I might speak abstractly about "military offensives" and "tactical leverage" and "political motives" and "instability."

Still, conversation about violence always becomes too morbid and too gloomy to continue. Exhausted by our collective curiosity about the world faraway, we might just drift back closer to home, back to the lighter experiences of being. We might chat about the richness and poorness of life in our shared city, New York. Maybe someone has discovered the best food-truck selling fish tacos deep in Queens. And as people begin shuffling out the door I would call after you. Claspng your hand, I would bid you a fond farewell. I would tell you that I sincerely hope we meet again at "one of these things."

The truth is, I would feel good about our encounter. I am caught in a war between two places I inhabit simultaneously. Pakistanis frequently kill American soldiers in Afghanistan. Pakistanis have tried to attack and kill civilians in many cities around the world. The American military and the CIA, meanwhile, will likely kill many more Pakistanis in any given week. The militaries of the two countries, all handshakes and stiff smiles for the cameras, seem to extract special satisfaction from terrorizing each other. The two countries are entangled in a secretive war that is unlike any other in the world. And that is why I would feel especially good about our meeting, because amid all the lying and cheating and killing and all the cloak-and-dagger diplomacy, I would have been able to tell you at least some of my story. I live for these moments of storytelling.

But I must be honest: I also know that I failed once again to explain the real story about a country that you really were

hoping to learn more about. You see, it all goes back much further than six decades of history. In some ways the country's story goes back more than fourteen hundred years, to the birth of Islam, or even before that to the creation of language, or maybe even to the rise of mountains and the carving of rivers in the land millions of years ago. When I told you that I speak Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, I could have also explained that the word "Urdu" was used to describe a *mélange* of different ethnicities that settled in military encampments in the shadows of the Himalayas centuries ago. "Pakistan" is actually an Urdu phrase, I might have added, made of two words: *pak* which means "pure," and *stan* which, like the English word "stand," describes a state of being. The country is literally called the "Space of Pure." Since you don't speak Punjabi, you would not have realized that when I said that my family is from the Punjab region, I was actually saying that they are from a "land of five rivers." I never got to tell you that there is a seven-hundred-year-old grave on the banks of one of those rivers that, I am told, belongs to one of my ancestors. I never got to explain that the city of Lahore is named after *Loh*, the son of the mythical Hindu god Rama. There were so many avenues we could have taken to travel to the heart of the matter, but they mostly went unexplored.

It's not your fault or mine. How could you even begin to understand the story of a whole nation in one brief encounter? How could we even expect to understand each other's life stories in all their perfect contours? It would be impossible even if we lived down the street from each other. And stories of nations are convoluted and distinct,

just like the stories of our own lives. Nations, like people, use stories to construct a particular place for themselves in this world. Nations have memories too—while you might remember that pep talk on that long drive home, the nation recalls the speech by the great leader atop the hill. You have that especially painful schoolyard fight, and the nation has that bad war on the border. You survived the terrible accident, and the nation lived through the great civil war. There was that move during middle school to a new city, which changed you forever, and the nation recalls the great migration, which changed everything.

Nations, like people, collect these stories as they grow. They line up words and they cement them together to build sentences, and these sentences join together to form concrete stories. These stories are stacked one upon the other with each passing day. And then one day, the special place in the world is built. From inside this palace of stories, we look out at the sprawling space around us and at the other palaces of stories built by other people and nations, some near and others far in the distance. From inside this space, we can explain to the world our existence and answer those questions that seem so tough when asked by an outsider, like "Where are you from?"

The words that make up a nation's history are vivid and colorful to that nation, because they choose those words carefully. Your stories are familiar and stirring because they are your special stories. And each story builds perfectly on the last one, because it is nations, like people, who decide the architecture of their existence in this world. When you pick one story from this edifice and share it with a stranger,

it doesn't always translate. A word that you might have learned from your grandfather or from your founding father, which so clearly evokes a warm feeling in you, might sound like garbled noise to a person who speaks another language. And since others don't know how a particular story fits into the larger structure, they can never understand its full value or its meaning. At the end of it all, only you understand the grand scheme of your palace of stories.



HERE IS ONE of my stories. When the airplanes struck on September 11, 2001, I was in a leafy college campus in rural Vermont a few hours' drive north of what would become known as Ground Zero. The air was crisp. The trees had not yet burst into the fiery yellow, orange, and red fall foliage that I had learned to anticipate eagerly. I was on my way to my morning class when a classmate stopped me in my path, and with cold concern beaming through her wide-open blue eyes, she told me about the attack on America. The towers were on the periphery of my consciousness. I had seen them passing through New York City a handful of times, but I had never really stood still to admire their splendor. On the morning of September 11, they were seared into my memory forever.

I changed course and turned toward the nearest television set. The cafeteria lounge was overflowing with people watching the events live. I saw the two towers billowing smoke from gaping dark craters near the top floors. The

camera did not move for a long time, and it seemed like nothing was really happening. Then, with a most awesome fluidity, one tower began to sink in on itself. I heard gasps and a girl burst into tears, bawling and screaming loudly as her friends tried to lead her away from it all. A few minutes later the second tower crumbled to the bottom of the screen. I stood there watching. Where, a few moments earlier, there had been two of the tallest structures built by man, there was now only dreadful black smoke.

The next morning, the editorial in the *New York Times* described the day before as "one of those moments in which history splits, and we define the world as 'before' and 'after.'" It was one of those days for me too. I woke up that morning to a double ring of my phone: an off-campus call. The serious-sounding man on the line introduced himself as an agent from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. I don't recall his name. I don't remember much of the conversation either, but I do remember two things: he made no reference to the events of the day before, and he asked me whether I felt safe where I was. I was in Vermont, one of the most serene places I had ever lived, so naturally I said yes, I did feel perfectly safe. And as his cold silence settled in, I felt more deeply imperiled than I had ever felt before.

Before he hung up abruptly, the man had said that he would call me back, and for many weeks my heart jumped every time my phone would double-ring. But he never called back. And I was left with only the eerie and bare knowledge that someone had sought me out in my dorm room in Vermont the day after the attack on America. As

time passed I began to wonder whether the man really was a federal agent. Maybe it was a prank by some lonely person who, in search of his own answers, had decided to reach out that morning? Was it someone I had once met in passing? Maybe even someone in my own small college town? Was he watching? Why?

Everyone trudged the campus grounds quietly in the days that followed, as if we were all processing what had happened in New York and were writing the story in our minds to fit into the architecture of our own lives. I tried to make sense of the number: three thousand dead. I wondered about the girl who had started to weep in the cafeteria. I heard her father worked in one of those towers. But then my thoughts would always return to the phone call, and it made my blood chill every time. Eventually I decided that I would never find out who had called me, and so I decided to leave that question behind. But I did understand why he had called. After eliminating every other reason, I recognized that I had received that phone call because of my family name: Mufti.

My surname is one of those words that I must explain for you to see how it fits into the disturbed architecture of my life. The word "mufti" has the same root as the Arabic word "*fatwa*." A fatwa is any opinion based on the law of Islam given by a recognized authority, or a mufti. It doesn't have to be a death sentence; it could simply be an opinion on what health insurance plan to choose. And it's a non-binding opinion, so different muftis might, for example, choose different insurance plans. So my last name literally means "One who gives a legal opinion." Somewhere in my

ancestry someone had once worked as a jurist in an Islamic court, and the name, I was told, had stuck. I had always known what my name meant to myself, but while Ground Zero was still fuming, I considered—perhaps for the first time—what it meant to others. It was this name that landed me on the wrong end of a cold phone line.

"This is a clash of civilizations," a student spat out in class one day. He was upset when he said it, and the words sounded dirty to me. I began to hear others using this phrase to explain all that rumbled in my world, just as the gears of another global war machine were beginning to turn over hungrily. "The clash of civilizations" was a phrase first used by the British-American professor Bernard Lewis, who taught history at Princeton University. Lewis wrote an article in 1990, as the Berlin Wall was falling, for the *Atlantic* in which he claimed that "the roots of Muslim rage" were in the religion of Islam, which had "inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence." The rage drew "its strength from ancient beliefs and loyalties," and it was a continuation of "the struggle between these rival systems" of Islam on the one hand and the West, rooted in Christendom, on the other. It was a rivalry that Lewis believed "has now lasted for some fourteen centuries." The real crux of the conflict between these two competing civilizations, Lewis said, was this: while Western civilization had evolved to separate church and state, the Islamic civilization had not. Since Western civilization was now triumphant and dominant in the world, "fundamentalist leaders" of Muslims were threatened by the idea of religion being separated from state in Muslim countries as well.

Lewis lamented that "Muslims experienced no such need and evolved no such doctrine" to separate church from state. But it was a cynical view. There had been no real separation of church and state because, as Lewis had noted elsewhere, there is no church in Islam. "The very notion of something that is separate or even separable from religious authority, expressed in Christian languages by such terms as *lay*, *temporal*, or *secular*, is totally alien to Islamic thought and practice." Lewis wrote this as an indictment but it was just reality, and while his claim that church and state could never be separate in Islam was technically true, so was the opposite: religious authority has always been diffuse, contested, and decentralized in Islam. There has never been an entity in Islam comparable to the Catholic Church. Islamic religious authority never coalesced around any central authority like the Pope. Since no central church ever existed in Islam there was also never an institution that tried to exert power over the state in the same way. So how do you even separate two units, when one of the units doesn't even exist? That is what was most depressing about Lewis's worldview: he identified a feature of Islamic tradition as the main cause for a supposed historic conflict with the West, and then pointed out that it was an intrinsic feature of the Islamic tradition. He pointed to an ailment in the relationship and also pressed that there was no cure for it. Violence between Islam and the West, he seemed to be suggesting, was natural, inevitable. The entire thesis reveled in hopelessness.

There is something about Islam that allows for "an explosive mixture of rage and hatred," Lewis wrote toward the

end of his magazine article. To illustrate this, he pointed to two examples of undue anger and violence against the United States in the Muslim world, and both of them were from Pakistan. The first event was the burning of the American embassy in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, in 1979, and the other was the uprising, a decade later, against the publication of *Satanic Verses*, by Salman Rushdie, before a fatwa of a death sentence was passed against him. Pointing to these two instances in Pakistan, Lewis argued, "It should by now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the levels of issues and policies and the governments pursuing them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations."

It was painful to read Lewis lead into the phrase "a clash of civilizations" with two examples from Pakistan. Yes, it was the world's only country founded for people bound together by their shared Islamic identity, but upon its independence from British rule, Pakistan had also purposely chosen to express its Islamic identity through a constitutional democracy inspired by the West. It was a country founded on the principles of "democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance, and social justice as enunciated by Islam." Pakistan was a product of the mixing of two civilizations. But where would the world's original democratic Islamic republic stand in Lewis's clash? How would it stand?

A contemporary of Lewis's at Harvard, Samuel P. Huntington, picked up on Lewis's idea and made it the central thesis of his own article, published in the popular monthly magazine *Foreign Affairs* in 1993. Huntington predicted that after the end of the Cold War, conflict would be mainly

about cultural issues and that a "clash of civilizations will dominate global politics." Huntington defined a civilization as the broadest cultural entity, and he counted "seven or eight" civilizations in the world. It was all a bit arbitrary. The island of Japan got its very own civilization in his thesis, while there was only "possibly" an African civilization. Then there was a Confucian, a Christian Orthodox, a Hindu, and a Latin American civilization. And of course there existed a Western civilization and an Islamic civilization, which, as Huntington described in great detail, were already locked in an emerging global conflict. "The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future," he wrote. "The centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline." Instead, he predicted, "It could become more virulent."

These ideas about a civilization clash had sprouted among the dank rubble of the demolished Berlin Wall at a time when everyone scrambled to make sense of the post-Cold War world. But they waned and wilted over a decade and all but died off. Then from the wreckage of the twin towers in New York they rose once again, growing abundantly as they knotted through the global imagination with ease. The words of these professors were read as the prophecies of sages. Huntington cultivated his magazine article into a book, and *The Clash of Civilizations* became an international best seller after the attacks. Bernard Lewis, meanwhile, sat down to advise the administration of President George W. Bush on its new war policy. And so there it was: a clash between an Islamic and a Western civilization was made real by a swift terrorist attack and the sheer force of a well-told story.

Weeks after the attack, American forces invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan's neighbor along its long western border. It was a cruel joke of history that the first battle in this new era of war landed on the doorstep of Pakistan, the only country in the world whose founders and whose written constitution had made a real effort to enmesh the political values and norms of the Islamic civilization with the Western civilization. America began paying billions of dollars in military and economic aid to Pakistan in order to win its loyalties in this war and to use its seaports and network of highways to supply American forces that landed in the tens of thousands into landlocked Afghanistan.

At first only a few stray American missiles landed on Pakistani soil, but over the decade that followed, the violence from the American war in Afghanistan would bleed deep into Pakistan. A few years in, the Pakistani military began mowing down its own people along the Afghan border, and soon guerrilla fighters from that region started a campaign of beheading Pakistanis in the outlying regions. Then suicide bombers started sneaking into Pakistani cities and slaughtering people by the dozens in mosques and restaurants and playgrounds. America began to send in robotic airplanes to bomb Pakistani villages, leaving heaps of dead bodies. Soon America and Pakistan became rivals, engaged in their own shadowy and bloody conflict for control over the region. There was misery in Afghanistan, and thousands of Pakistanis and thousands of Americans would die over a decade.

People like Huntington had thought that the clash of civilizations would unfold on a global and continental

scale. But that never happened. Some of the most important Muslim countries sided with America and the West in its wars. Global politics marched on to its standard beat. Instead, the clash of civilizations tore open inside Pakistan. As the violence consumed the country more every day, the nation of Muslims in the Islamic republic began searching desperately for a path that would deliver them from the bloodshed and misery. Some said the only way left was to erase all traces of Western ideals from the Pakistani state and to remove any symbols and institutions that represented Western civilizations in the country. Others argued that unless Islam was carved out from the soul of the nation, it would consume it like a cancer. They said an Islamic democracy was a mirage. Most Pakistanis simply yearned for a just, peaceful, and prosperous life. They did not care whether it came in a secular or an Islamic guise. Through the decade of violence, those who continued to hold fast to the founding ideal of the country grew fewer and fewer, and quieter. But they did not disappear. A peaceful existence, some continued to believe, was in line with Islamic as well as Western values. There was no need for one to be annihilated by the other. The promise of Pakistan was becoming endangered.

Was it hopeless? Or was there some way Pakistan could survive and deliver to the world an example of a state that could bridge civilizations, a place that could feel 100 percent Islamic and 100 percent Western? The answers mattered to me. I began reporting from Pakistan as a journalist. I revisited the stories of a nation. I traveled through space and time over thousands of miles and thousands of years, examining each tier of the palace of

stories Pakistan had built, sentence by sentence, layer by layer, subjecting it all to cold historical analysis. In New York, London, New Delhi, Islamabad, Mecca, and many points in between, I revisited the character and places that made up Pakistan's history. I traveled through the country, meeting people and touching gravestones, navigating a landscape mangled by violence. I read many volumes of history during the long travels up and down the Indus River that runs the length of Pakistan, from the Himalayas to the Arabian Sea.

And there is something else you must know: as I unraveled the history of Pakistan and Islam, I found my family tales embedded within it. I soon realized that it was much more than my last name, Mufti, that tied me close to an Islamic past and a national story. There were columns in my own palace of stories that stood in the story of the nation. And so I began studying my own family's past too, and it all began to fit together seamlessly. I have an old yellowing scroll that ties my bloodline to the tribe of Muhammad. In my office are the spiral-bound notepads from the hours of interviews with religious scholars, politicians, and military commanders and my own father and mother. Among the scholarly detritus in my room is an old tattered diary with a fading pink flowered cover that belonged to my maternal grandmother in her teenage years when she lived in Afghanistan after World War I. The biography of the Prophet Muhammad, originally written more than a thousand years ago, sits on my shelf. The travelogue of a Chinese traveler who passed through the Punjab is even older than that. This leather-bound notebook with a broken string tie is the one

that I kept by my hospital bed in India after I got into a terrible accident. All around me is a papery palace of stories. These letters with runny and patchy ink are addressed to my great-grandfather; these old British military documents tied together with a white handkerchief describe the war heroics of a great-uncle. A news clipping announces my birth in a local Ohio newspaper; my paternal grandfather's expense diary charts his fluctuating fortunes. Among these heaps are different renditions of the holy book of Islam, the Quran. It's all here in stacks and rows around me. I am surrounded by towering columns of words, my own grand palace of stories.

I am forever tied to these stories. But what about you? Will you really be able to forget about Pakistan when this war ends? You will probably not. I know that after the war in Afghanistan ends, the violence in Pakistan will continue, and you will not be able to look away from the world's sixth largest country, which also has nuclear weapons. Iran is right there too, neighboring Pakistan. And much later, when all the tangles in the Middle East are straightened, the world will turn its attention to Asia, charting a future course with two rising powers, China and India. And once again, Pakistan will be there, bordering both of these countries. You, like me, will not escape Pakistan anytime soon. You, like me, are tied to it in geography and history. And maybe that's a good thing. If you have come this far, why not stay to see how it all builds to a climax? If you're anything like me, you might even believe that this will all end well.

I could not extricate myself from this story even if I wanted to. My own story is part of Pakistan and Islam. It

is tangled with America's and with the rest of the world's. Family, religion, nation, and war are all cemented into the structure. So it is a pleasant twist of fate that I speak your language. I am no historian, but I am a journalist, and what I do best is tell stories. And I believe I have a key to the door that leads into this palace of stories. So let me be your dragoman. Allow me to invite you into this house and see how it looks from the inside. I want you to be able to see each word in its perfect relief and I want you to see how each story fits together. I want you to peer out the windows and see how the world looks from here. You might leave this palace of stories and still not fully understand its architecture and design, but at least you will have seen where I come from. And then, perhaps, you will even help me see where we are going.

Now all that is left for me to do is to pick the moment where it could all have started and then, as people have been doing for generations and generations wherever humans have built homes and civilizations, begin telling the story.