

I remember three months in Pakistan when I was six. My grandmother was close to the end of her life and the purpose of the visit was to give her company for her last few days. My parents were anticipating death. I however had little understanding of this and instead immersed myself into this new foreign land. This country smelt different there were no roads but tracks which smelt of dust and buffaloes. I felt so different here- there was more freedom; excitement and best of all adventure. I would walk to the village school without adult supervision but with the neighbour's girl who treated me like a princess. I was from England and wore different clothes and spoke an entirely different language. I remember teaching her English words like 'black' for the colour of the buffalo's skin although it was perhaps not the right word. The buffaloes had skin like the black rubber of tyres stretched over their fat bellies. Some had chocolate brown skin which was smooth to touch. They had faces like Joleen Lescott from Star Trek and big white horns popping out of their heads. In return for my teaching she painted different henna patterns onto my palm. The earthy smell of the painted flowers on my hand made me feel like this was home. Her home was a farm! I remember my eyes wide open watching her mother milk the buffalo pulling the teats rhythmically and the sound of the white milk splashing into her pail. I remember the taste of the hot milk straight from the buffalo it tasted warm, milky but different. These were happy times for me discovering unknown cousins and playing in the fields with dogs and hay. At home in England life was a strange contrast; the lives were more structured, restrained and quite frankly more boring. Here in Pakistan you were free to roam the dirt tracks and the fields for hours on your own; experiencing life for yourself.

Death was closer, however than I thought. I was quite a feisty child even then and the wealth of wildlife here such as the bloated buffaloes, the springy lizards which whizzed across ceilings and the huge shiny ants were fascinating. But it seemed that even more primal instincts were to take over. One day my father saw a stray bird flying in the back garden of his childhood home here we were living. The bird flew into the mango trees ripe with fruit. My father offered to capture this bird and I eagerly agreed that he should. A few racing minutes later the bird was captured under a basket. Another offer was made soon after. Do you want to eat it? Eating a live bird which we captured ourselves? Watch it being killed and then cooked and then eat it? A normal timid perhaps tame girl would have shied away in horror at the prospect of killing a 'pretty' bird. I however fervently agreed. A few hours later the live bird had been carried in the basket to the village shop which my father's uncle owned. This man, my great-uncle was trained in killing animals to be eaten in the Islamic way. The blood vessel to the brain is to be severed quickly so as to minimise pain and then the animal is dead the blood is to be drained to make it easier to cook. When explained in this clinical way the experience is very different from the actual thing. The neck was severed in seconds and I watched excitedly- this was how life was how life worked. It was fascinating seeing the process by which an animal came to my plate. At the next stage the blood was drained. A normal child might have been nauseated or upset. I was not scared of blood. I watched the red liquid splash into the water of the drain and get washed away down the streets. This was Pakistan and the place did not just smell or look different- life itself was different.

We were in a village where there was no running water or even proper toilets. For my benefit a television was bought and a whole day of driving was employed to find pizza which was pronounced in a different tongue and also tasted different to my

foreign tongue. The bird which I had witnessed the death of tasted divine. It had been made into an Indian curry one of my favourite. The meat juices were definitely not chicken. This had not been an ordinary curry it had been an insight into the power of human beings over a poor bird. You may think I had resolved to be a lifelong vegetarian. No! The next week when another bird had the bad fortune to fly aimlessly into the back garden, it was I who enthusiastically demanded that my father succumb to my need to see this animal die again. However my father disagreed- the animal would suffer if it kept trying to escape out the basket. Shocked and annoyed I relented. No wild bird curry for me that night! Yes Pakistan was different it changed me and opened my eyes. After those three months my life was never quite the same.

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