

Sometimes we went up to the mountains and sometimes down to the river on family trips. It was a big stream, too deep and fast to cross when the snows melted in summer. The boys would fish using earthworms threaded like beads on a string hanging from a long stick. Some of them whistled, believing this would attract the fish. They weren't particularly tasty fish. Their mouths were very rough and horny. We called them *chaqwartee*. Sometimes a group of girls would go down to the river for a picnic with pots of rice and sherbet. Our favourite game was 'weddings'. We would get into two groups, each supposed to be a family, then each family would have to betroth a girl so we could perform a marriage ceremony. Everyone wanted me in their family as I was from Mingora and modern. The most beautiful girl was Tanzela, and we often gave her to the other group so we could then have her as our bride.

The most important part of the mock wedding was jewellery. We took earrings, bangles and necklaces to decorate the bride, singing Bollywood songs as we worked. Then we would put make-up on her face that we'd taken from our mothers, dip her hands in hot limestone and soda to make them white, and paint her nails red with henna. Once she was ready, the bride would start crying and we would stroke her hair and try to convince her not to worry. 'Marriage is part of life,' we said. 'Be kind to your mother-in-law and father-in-law so they treat you well. Take care of your husband and be happy.'

Occasionally there would be real weddings with big feasts which went on for days and left the family bankrupt or in debt. The brides would wear exquisite clothes and be draped in gold, necklaces and bangles given by both sides of the family. I read that Benazir Bhutto insisted on wearing glass bangles at her wedding to set an example but the tradition of adorning the bride still continued. Sometimes a plywood coffin would be brought back from one of the mines. The women would gather at the house of the dead man's wife or mother and a terrible wailing would start and echo round the valley, which made my skin crawl.

At night the village was very dark with just oil lamps twinkling in houses on the hills. None of the older women had any education but they all told stories and recited what we call *tapey*, Pashto couplets. My grandmother was particularly good at them. They were usually about love or being a Pashtun. 'No Pashtun leaves his land of his own sweet will,' she would say. 'Either he leaves from poverty or he leaves for love.' Our aunts scared us with ghost stories, like the one about Shalgwatay, the twenty-fingered man, who they warned would sleep in our beds. We would cry in terror, though in fact as 'toe' and 'finger' in Pashto is the same, we were all twenty-fingered, but we didn't realise. To make us wash, our aunts told stories about a scary woman called Shashaka, who would come after you with her muddy hands and stinking breath if you didn't take a bath or wash your hair, and turn you into a dirty woman with hair like rats' tails filled with insects. She might even kill you. In the winter when parents didn't want their children to stay outside in the snow they would tell the story about the lion or tiger which must always make the first step in the snow. Only when the lion or tiger has left their footprint were we allowed to go outside.

As we got older the village began to seem boring. The only television was in the *hujra* of one of the wealthier families, and no one had a computer.

Women in the village hid their faces whenever they left their purdah quarters and could not meet or speak to men who were not their close relatives. I wore more fashionable clothes and didn't cover my face even when I became a teenager. One of my male cousins was angry and asked my father, 'Why isn't she covered?' He replied, 'She's my daughter. Look after your own affairs.' But some of the