gloried like a bloodhound in the different smells: *cerdo* (pork) sautéing in garlic, *papas fritas* (fried potatoes), *sopa de albóndigas* (meatball soup).

We didn't move to Spain to recover some rustic, romantic, agrarian life. That's been gone for some time. Rather, we moved to live surrounded by whatever traditions are here now. As when, at the stroke of two, citizens one and all pull down the heavy metal grates of their work life, physically and metaphorically, and go home to their families for *la cena grande* — the big meal. Somehow, amid all the shove and shuffle of the modern commercial world, the Spanish have had the good sense to still organize work around life, instead of the other way around. Imagine stopping right in the middle of your fervid workday and taking a three-hour break. One hour to enjoy your meal with your family, one hour to converse extravagantly, using all body parts, and one hour for siesta. Can you think of anything more decadent or more civilized?

Pulling up beneath the kitchen window of my house, I could hear the girls, already out of school for the day, laughing, and I could smell Sue's shrimp paella cooking on the stove.

Vivir la vida.

MURAD KALAM

If It Doesn't Kill You First

FROM *Outside*

I WANDER BAREFOOT out of the Grand Mosque through a cruel blanket of Saudi heat, floating in a sea of strangers from almost every country on Earth. It's my third day in the city of Mecca, where I've come to take part in the *hajj*, the annual five-day pilgrimage to some of Islam's holiest places. This trek is required once in the lifetime of every able-bodied Muslim, and I'm one of two million people, part of the largest mass movement of humans on the planet.

The birthplace of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, born in the sixth century, Mecca sits at the base of the Hejaz Mountains in western Saudi Arabia, forty-six miles east of the Red Sea port of Jidda. To someone watching from atop the thousand-foot peaks that surround the city, we must look like countless insects as we spill out of the high, arching gates of the 3.8-million-square-foot Grand Mosque, the most important religious site in the Islamic world.

Mecca is home to 800,000 gracious people, any of whom will tell you not to worry about your well-being when you're here. "This is Mecca," they say. "No one will harm you." Maybe not, but the less devout might steal from you — I'm barefoot because somebody ran off with my sandals this morning when I removed them, as required, before entering the Grand Mosque to pray.

Meanwhile, it's a fact of hajj life that people die all around. Earlier, I watched the Saudi religious police — the *mutawaeen*, stoic, hard-faced men with henna-dyed beards — carry green-shrouded gurneys holding the bodies of five pilgrims who died today, setting them on the marble floor of the Grand Mosque for funeral prayers.

In one twenty-four-hour period during my pilgrimage, eighty-two hajjis will die. People perish in many ways, from natural causes like heart attacks to unnatural ones like dehydration and trampling.

Trampling is what I'm concerned about at the moment, and with each frantic step I become more worried about my safety. The problem is the hajj's sheer numbers. Despite many improvements, the hajj facilities and infrastructure — which are managed by the House of Saud, the ironfisted royal family that has ruled Saudi Arabia since 1932 — haven't expanded to meet the fourfold increase in attendance that has occurred over the past thirty-five years. The result is that people too often wind up in death traps.

In 1990, a stampede in the pedestrian tunnel leading from Mecca to Arafat, a rocky, arid plain twelve miles southeast of Mecca and one of the final way stations of the hajj, killed 1,426 pilgrims. Another 270 were trampled to death four years later at Jamarat, a site just east of Mecca where a ritual called the Stoning of the Devil takes place, and the most crowded of all hajj settings. In 1997, 343 pilgrims burned to death and another 1,500 were injured in a giant fire started by a gas cooker in the tent city of Mina, an encampment a few miles east of Mecca where all pilgrims gather near the end of the hajj.

It's a bizarre sensation, but I keep imagining my own demise, visualizing my shrouded body being carried into the Grand Mosque above the wheeling masses. Every Muslim knows that a believer who dies on this journey is guaranteed a place in paradise. Personally, though, I'd much rather live to tell about it.

Why take this risk? The answer starts with my spiritual beliefs. I've been a Sunni Muslim for nine years. (The Sunnis make up 90 percent of all Muslims but are the minority in Shiite-dominated nations like Iran and Iraq. Sunnis and Shiites differ on major theological matters — like who should have succeeded Muhammad after his death, in A.D. 632.) I was born in Seattle in 1973 to a Jamaican father and an American mother, grew up a lapsed Baptist turned agnostic in Phoenix, and started college in Boston, at Harvard, in 1994.

As an undergrad, I happened upon an English translation of the Koran, the written version of Muhammad's revelations from Allah. I was so floored by its persuasive power that I converted to Islam,

stopped drinking, and adopted an Islamic name, Murad Kalam. Like many new converts, I was zealous and naive at first. I bought the fundamentalist line that the cause of all the Muslim world's problems — poverty, corruption, and repression — boiled down to a simple failure to apply the tenets of the religion, and nothing more.

Like every American Muslim, I've had a lot to think about in the past few years. When Al Qaeda launched its attack on September 11, 2001, I was a third-year law student at Harvard and an aspiring novelist. I had not yet traveled to Muslim countries, but I had made friends from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, and they'd schooled me in the complex realities of Muslim life. While Islam is dear to the majority of Muslims, they said, Koranic law should not be taken as the cure-all for everything. In many Muslim societies, religion was a smoke screen for old-fashioned greed, tyranny, and hypocrisy, as well as numerous distortions of Muhammad's ideas for twisted political goals.

Among the worst examples of that last problem, obviously, is Al Qaeda, which has been a scourge in the United States, Afghanistan, Kenya, Yemen, and, more recently, Turkey and Saudi Arabia itself. Though Saudi Arabia, birthplace of the exiled Osama bin Laden, has been relatively safe from terror in the past, that changed after my pilgrimage, which took place in February 2003. On May 12, 2003, Al Qaeda truck bombers hit a housing complex in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, killing twenty-six Saudis and foreigners working in the country, eight Americans among them. On November 8, terrorists, probably linked to Al Qaeda, killed seventeen Arabs in a similar strike.

In the aftermath, Saudi officials have cracked down on terrorism with a fervor that will likely translate into heightened security measures at the 2004 hajj, which runs from January 31 to February 4. The hajj itself has never been the target of a terror strike, but according to published reports, in a raid carried out not long after the November bombings in Riyadh, the Saudis uncovered a plot by Islamic militants to booby-trap copies of the Koran, allegedly in order to maim and kill pilgrims during the hajj.

The Saudi government has to be worried about terror occurring under its watch, since its role as keeper of the holy places is a major pillar of its legitimacy. The closest thing to such an attack occurred

back in November 1979, when a radical cleric named Juhayman ibn Muhammad and hundreds of followers barricaded themselves in the Grand Mosque for two weeks to protest what they saw as political and religious corruption in the House of Saud. Before it was over, dozens of soldiers and more than a hundred of ibn Muhammad's partisans had died in gunfights.

Even though the hajj was not in progress, attacking the Grand Mosque was an incredible blasphemy, and the punishment was swift. After their capture, ibn Muhammad and his band were executed in cities and towns throughout Saudi Arabia — dispatched by means of public beheading.

Throughout the international turmoil following 9/11, I remained a devout Muslim, and I found myself torn between my beliefs and my country. I've worried that President George W. Bush has been too heavy-handed in his war against terror, both overseas and in the United States. At the same time, I've felt oddly insulated from any anti-Muslim backlash. Too pedigreed to lose a job, too American-looking to be assaulted, I felt alienated from my fellow Muslims in Boston, some of whom were attacked on the street by angry locals. I was drifting, missing prayers. I worried that I was failing Islam. So, in late 2001, I started thinking about trying the hajj.

To prepare for my trip, I read narratives of pilgrimages to Mecca, beginning with the hajj chapters in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the 1964 book about the political and spiritual quest of the famous black Muslim activist. In older books I found tales of desert caravans, raids by Bedouin clans, near starvation, and hard-won spiritual enlightenment. For 1,500 years the hajj has been the ultimate Muslim adventure. It remains a soul-rousing journey that, I decided, could snap me into shape.

The hajj itself predates the prophet Muhammad. According to Muslim belief, Abraham established it and built the sacred Kaaba — a fifty-foot-tall windowless sanctuary made of black granite — but over time the rites in Mecca degenerated. Pagan Meccans set up 360 idols outside the Kaaba, and Mecca became a center for worshipping cult, tribal, and polytheistic gods.

Muhammad, born in A.D. 570, received his call at age forty and risked his life to establish Islamic monotheism in Mecca. Persecuted and facing imminent assassination for teaching that there

is no god but Allah, he fled with his followers to Medina in A.D. 622. Later, after several battles between Muslims and nonbelievers, the Meccans converted to Islam, and the prophet returned to rule. During his final hajj, Muhammad stressed the equality of man, respect for property, and the importance of prayer, fasting, and charity.

The pilgrimage itself is a twenty-five-mile trip, made by bus and on foot, that starts and ends in Mecca, with shifting dates determined from year to year by the Islamic lunar calendar. Pilgrims begin arriving two or three weeks ahead of time in Mecca, where they spend several days performing rituals and prayers inside the Grand Mosque. At this point, many hajjis take a multiday side trip to Medina, the oasis city where Muhammad established his first community of followers.

In a transition that marks the official beginning of the hajj, all pilgrims start to converge on Mina, where they camp for the night. The next day they proceed five miles farther east to Arafat, to face the Mount of Mercy, a hill where they meditate on the day of judgment. The hajjis leave Arafat at sunset and walk three miles to the valley of Muzdalifa to camp under the stars. There they pray and collect pebbles, which they'll take to Jamarat the next morning. At Jamarat, two miles northwest of Muzdalifa, hajjis throw stones at three fifty-eight-foot-tall granite pillars, symbolically warding off Satan. After completing this, pilgrims shave their heads or cut off a lock of hair, to mark the end of the hajj. Then they return to Mecca to complete their final rituals inside the Grand Mosque.

Initially, I'd wanted to do all this in the most rigorous way possible. My hope was to take a boat across the Red Sea from Cairo — where I was living for four months while researching my second novel — and then ride horseback from Jidda to Mecca, camping out in the vastness of the Arabian Peninsula.

But after checking in with the Saudi embassy in Washington, D.C., I discovered that the days of romantic pilgrimages were over. The hajj is too dangerous to allow everyone to chart his own course, and under Saudi law, to get a visa, every pilgrim who has the financial resources must make airline and hotel reservations. The embassy passed me on to the well-oiled D.C.-based hajj machine, Grand Travel, where I was informed that not only was a package tour required but also that tours were segregated by na-

tionality. I would be lumped in with ninety-eight other American Muslims.

Making one last stab, I asked the agent if he would book my flight and let me wing the rest. He laughed. "You want suffering, brother? You'll be suffering enough."

I set off for Saudi Arabia on January 28, 2003. Pilgrims prepare for the hajj by taking a ritual bath and putting on the symbolic robes of *ihram*, thereby entering a spiritual state in which differences of race, wealth, and nationality are erased. My robing took place in a hurry at the Cairo airport, where I followed a pimply faced Egyptian skycap into a dimly lit industrial closet.

"Get naked," he said. For ten Egyptian pounds (two bucks), the young man expertly dressed me in two white sheets, one placed horizontally around my waist, the other over my left shoulder.

Afterward, I jumped on an EgyptAir flight to Jidda. From there I traveled by bus forty-six miles to the Al Shohada Hotel, in Mecca, where I met my tour group. Once in Mecca, hajjis immediately proceed to the Grand Mosque, a massive coliseum that contains the Kaaba, the cube-shaped granite shrine toward which Muslims all over the world direct their daily prayers. Pilgrims are required to circle the Kaaba seven times, counterclockwise, praying as they go. This ritual is called *tawaf*. At the end of the hajj, when they return to Mecca, they must complete the *tawaf* again.

Two nights after I completed my initial *tawaf*, inside the airy, luxurious lobby of the Al Shohada, I got a first look at the American hajjis as we assembled to meet our tour leaders. Studying them, I felt a painful rush of our collective inadequacy. They were a collection of well-meaning people from all walks of life: taxi drivers, salesmen, mailmen, lawyers, doctors, and hotel workers. But they also seemed like a reflection of myself — slightly out of shape, self-conscious in pilgrim garb, clearly a little panicked.

We gathered in a hotel conference room, where Sheik Hussein Chowat, our spiritual adviser, paced before us, fielding questions. He's a squat, bearded, soft-spoken Arab in his forties who teaches Islam in northern Virginia. Here, it was his job to put the fear of Allah into us, stressing the need to do everything right. "You have to do the hajj carefully," he warned. "If you don't, Allah might not accept it."

Our group leader, Nabil Hamid, a grinning, Egypt-born chain

smoker from the Washington, D.C., area, also in his forties, sat by himself at a nearby table. He was the fixer, solver of the inevitable crises: lost hajjis, broken-down buses, sickness, emotional burnout. He fiddled with his prayer beads while Hussein responded to a question posed by a middle-aged woman, also from Washington, who had completed a hajj in 2002. (Like many pilgrims, this woman had returned to the hajj on behalf of another Muslim who couldn't make the journey.) She mentioned in passing that at the end of her first hajj, she had not completed a final *tawaf* around the Kaaba.

"Sister," Hussein interrupted, "your hajj was invalid."

The woman was stunned. The sheik, with iron certainty, seemed to be telling her she had gone through great expense and weeks of pain for nothing. I wanted to find out the woman's name, but it wouldn't have done any good. I couldn't approach her or talk to her: Personal contact between unrelated women and men is forbidden here.

Now, it's my third day. With a pair of new sandals, I wander down the rolling streets to enter the Grand Mosque and pray. After ten blocks of wading through crowds, I come to the mosque's towering granite minarets, entering alongside stone-faced Turks dressed in olive-green, African women in flowery headdresses, and a gaggle of tiny Indonesians dressed in white cloaks. The whispered prayer of millions sounds like rustling water along a riverbank. The Kaaba rises above the marble floor, and I move closer, meeting the stride of the floating multitudes and chanting along with them.

I exit onto Al Masjid Al Haram, Mecca's main street, which is thick with lame and disfigured beggars. Crying children from Africa kneel on the grimy road; when they don't cry loud enough, their mothers appear from street corners and beat them. One girl has wrapped a gauze bandage around her little brother's head and smudged it with lipstick to mimic a bloody wound.

Tired and starved for a glimpse of the world beyond Mecca, I retire to a café in the back of my hotel to watch CNN, hoping to get the latest on the still-pending war between the United States and Iraq. Inside, I run into somebody from my tour group, Aaron Craig, a handsome African-American engineering student from San Diego. Aaron is a recent convert in his late twenties, and he's dressed like a Saudi in a full *jallabeyah* robe — a flowing ankle-

length gown worn by men. The robe isn't required for the hajj, but Aaron is signaling his burning desire to look 100 percent Muslim.

"You know," he tells me, sipping tea, "I've already seen lots of mistakes made by pilgrims. And the bumping and pushing and nationalism! And you wonder why we don't have Muslim unity."

This is Aaron's first visit to the Middle East. Like me when I converted, he seems convinced that pure application of Islam is the answer to everything.

"People are trying to change the religion, brother," he continues.

"What do you mean?"

"The sellout Muslims in America."

He's talking about moderates, people who live suburban lives, have non-Muslim friends, watch TV.

"Allah's religion is perfect. The sellouts want to say that jihad does not mean jihad. Meanwhile, Muslims are being attacked in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Palestine. You have to believe in it or you are a disbeliever."

This talk startles me. *Jihad* is a loaded word, referring to both armed resistance in defense of Islam and a private struggle to bolster one's faith. I wonder if he would think I'm a sellout. My jihad has always been intensely personal, concerning prayers, family, success, and finding the peace that lately has eluded me — peace that, so far, continues to elude me during this hajj.

In the evening, when the streets are empty, I call my wife, who's in the United States, from a nearby cabin with pay phones. It's staffed by smart-alecky young Saudis dressed in Western T-shirts and blue jeans. They look like they'd rather be listening to Tupac or dancing in a club — anything but herding us pilgrims around.

"Why didn't you tell me the streets are filled with crooks?" I jokingly ask them in Arabic. "My sandals were stolen from the Grand Mosque."

"All Meccans are good, all Muslims are good," one replies robotically. He offers me a Marlboro, one of the few naughty pleasures tolerated in Mecca.

"No," the other declares. "Some Meccans are good. Some are bad."

It's three days later, February 3, and I'm standing in the hallway of the Dallah Hotel with Aaron. We have left Mecca, boarded a bus for

Medina, and arrived at sundown, just in time to make the last prayers of the day. The ride here was soothing, with African pilgrims dressed in white walking the road beside us, chanting loudly, "*Labaik, Allah, labaik*" ("Here I am, Allah, here I am"). Medina is an oasis 210 miles north of Mecca. It's a smaller, more comfortable city, its streets cleaner and less congested.

The hotel is swarming with African-American converts and Kuwaitis. As we prepare to leave for the Prophet's Mosque, Aaron shares a big piece of news: His wife has been offered a position teaching English in Riyadh, and they're thinking of making the move.

"Murad," he says, "the Saudis — what are they like?"

There's a lot I could say about that. I spent a week in Saudi Arabia in 2002, and I was shocked by the restrictiveness of everyday life, where most pleasures, even innocent ones like G-rated movies, are banned. I've known too many American Muslims who studied in Saudi Arabia and found, alongside the unbearable dreariness, the same hypocrisies, vices, and bigotry that they thought they'd left behind.

In the end I say little to Aaron; I'm leery about interfering with his destiny. "The Saudis make loyal friends," I tell him. "But there is no social life here. I think you will miss the States."

Aaron sighs, then laughs. "I don't care," he says. "They've got Kentucky Fried Chicken and Burger King. That's all the culture I need. I just want to hear the call to prayer in the morning."

At twilight, Aaron and I wander down the windy street to the Prophet's Mosque. Set on flat land in the city center, its white granite walls are cast in beautiful greenish light. Six thirty-story minarets ascend from its corners, poking into the night sky. Inside, the shrine is huge, spanning 1.7 million square feet. At prayer time, each row of prostrate men extends nearly a mile.

Inspiring though it is, Medina does little to lift my sagging spirits during the six days we stay here. Aside from the physical discomfort — I'm suffering through my second case of flu, and my body aches from walking — something spiritual is missing. I cannot yet say that I'm feeling any different than before I arrived in Mecca, and I'm disappointed in the way the Saudis manage the whole thing, giving too little attention to safety and security. Not for the first time, I'm wondering if I'm crazy to be here.

*

After a week of Medina's prayer and quiet, our buses show up again on February 8, a Saturday, to take us about 210 miles to Mina, where all two million hajjis are heading to enact one of mankind's grandest mass rituals, starting tomorrow. Bounded by mountains on two sides, Mina is home to a permanent tent city that sits between the plain of Arafat and Mecca's eastern boundary. It's a small metropolis of 44,000 identical fifteen-foot-high, aluminum-framed tents, placed on a square-mile quadrant. The Jamarat overpass — a huge two-level walkway that leads pilgrims to the three granite pillars representing Satan — sits roughly a mile to the northwest, in the direction of Mecca. A string of mosques borders the tent city in every direction.

We float into Mina, across the dirt roads between the tents, which are sectioned off by region and country. The bus stops before the entrance to what's called the Egyptian section. Nabil Hamid, our group leader, has placed us in an area called 42/2.

"Remember that number," he says sternly, pointing to a sign. "It's the only way to get back. If you are lost here, you are lost." We find our tent space, a 10,000-square-foot enclosure for fifty men.

After nightfall, Nabil leads us out to the site of Jamarat to show us the mile-long path from the tent and back. Just before we leave, Sheik Ahmed Shiribini, a forty-something Egyptian-born Muslim from Denver who's on his third hajj, issues a warning about the dangers awaiting us at the Jamarat walkway.

"If you lose your sandals, if you drop your money, your sunglasses, do not go back!" he says. "I was here four years ago, and I saw with my own eyes a man who'd dropped his wallet on the overpass trampled to death by the crowds."

Nabil carries a twelve-foot sign that reads U.S.A. We wander across the dark dirt lanes, past patches of paved road where pilgrims sleep on the ground. We turn a corner, walking down a longer road, until we come to the infamous overpass, a mile-long, three-hundred-foot-wide structure. You can get to the three granite pillars from this bridge or an underpass below it. The structure is built to hold 100,000 people, but three times that number will crowd it in the thick of Jamarat. This overload caused a collapse in 1998 that killed 118 pilgrims.

One of our group, a young doctor from Pennsylvania named Shakeel Shareef, points to the street under the bridge. "That's where all the people were killed," he says.

Hearing this, Aaron swallows and his voice goes big. "Allah is all-knowing and all-powerful," he says. "If we are supposed to die at Jamarat, it is part of his will. What better place to die?"

But I can see the fear on his face. It's oddly comforting to know that he's as scared as I am.

It's eight o'clock on the morning of February 11, the day I'll perform the Stoning of the Devil ritual, and I'm lost. At the moment, I'm in Mina, walking on a street beneath the mountain valleys, surrounded by exultant pilgrims hustling toward Jamarat. On each side of me, the numberless tents sweep out beneath the mountains.

A lot has happened since this time yesterday. In the morning we left early as our bus raced toward the Mount of Mercy for the nighttime vigil. Hajjis in surgical masks streamed beside us in a fog of exhaust; young boys surfed the hoods of antiquated American school buses, their white robes flapping in the wind.

But this glorious motion didn't last long: We spent much of the day either stuck in traffic or walking around lost, and I got separated twice from my group. At sundown it looked like we might not make Muzdalifa by midnight. Sheik Hussein, our spiritual adviser, informed us that if we didn't get there by then, we would have to lay out cash for the sacrifice of a sheep in Mecca, to atone for this failure in the hajj.

When a pilgrim objected to this — shouldn't our group leader, Nabil, have to pay, since he is responsible for getting us around? — Sheik Hussein wagged his finger and said, "You do not understand worship! I don't care about the money! This is between you and Nabil! I am here to help you worship Allah!"

In the end we got there, but in these crowds, it's always easy to get lost again. Right now, pushing my way forward in the Mina morning, I have no idea where I am. I have a vague sense that my tent at the Egyptian camp is straight ahead, but Mina is so rambling, its hills so full of identical tents, that I can't be sure. I walk forward, pacing ahead of the crowds of half-sleeping pilgrims.

Two hours pass. When I finally get my bearings, around 10 A.M., I realize that I'm just one street removed from 42/2, but it's hard to get all the way there. Pushing through the crowds is like wading through waist-high water. I am caught on a street congested with pilgrims and tour buses, vans, and trucks on their way to Jamarat. Blocks away, pilgrims are flooding the street from both directions,

coming back from Muzdalifa and racing toward Jamarat. Trapped in a hot, heaving crowd, I suffer the most terrifying claustrophobia of my life.

I force my way through the street until it is impossible to take a step forward. Suddenly there's an explosion of human pressure from all sides, and I find myself standing face to face with a small, neatly dressed Iranian hajj leader in wire-rim glasses. The Iranian's eyes go wide as pilgrims on each side of the road begin to rush toward us. Africans are shoving through. Saudi policemen stand on trucks and rooftops, doing nothing as they watch the street below them devolve into madness. Women shout "Stop!" in Farsi and wave their hands, but no one can stop the crowd from crushing in. I cannot move. I can only pray. The crowd erupts in frenzied screaming. A row of middle-aged Iranian women fall over like dominoes.

Nigerian pilgrims start pushing through violently. Feeble, veiled women shout the only Arabic words understood by every pilgrim: "*Haram! Haram!*" ("Shame on you!"). Women and small old men are getting trampled in the mud. I find an opening through the maelstrom and hurry to a parked truck. I climb into the truck, my sandals left behind in the street mud, my bare feet burning on the truck bed's hot, rusty metal floor.

Nigerians crawl onto the truck from all sides. I can do little more than watch as screaming Iranian and Nigerian women are crushed on the street beneath us, a sea of white burqas, angled shoulders, crying, pleading faces, the flashing of outstretched arms. I reach down and pull a young Nigerian woman into the truck. Like me, she is crying, her face racked with fear. An old Iranian woman in white clings to the Nigerian's waist as I pull her up, her body floating on a wave of white-cloaked women. In another language, she thanks me for saving her life.

And then, in what seems like just a moment, the street is somehow cleared behind us. Women lie moaning in the mud. The truck's engine chugs; it zips forward six or seven blocks down the now-empty street. I watch pilgrims in the distance climbing from the piled bodies to their feet on the muddy, empty road.

I jump off the truck and walk barefoot back to my camp through a cloud of diesel exhaust. The scene of the stampede is six blocks away, shockingly clear. When I return to it, the road has been swept

of thirty or forty people who — I can only assume from what I saw — have been badly injured or killed. (I never find out, but the next day I read in the *Saudi Times* that fourteen people died a half-mile away in a different stampede at Jamarat.)

I am angry — angry at the Saudis for permitting such chaos. But beneath my anger, there is also exultation, something electric, happiness to have survived, the clarity that comes from facing death. Around noon, I finally reach 42/2, entering through an iron gate. Sheik Hussein is speaking with a veiled woman from the American group.

"I must talk to you," I tell him, sobbing.

He takes me by the wrist down a concrete path, and we stand in the shade of a fluttering tent. "I was almost killed, Sheik Hussein! There was a stampede in the street. I jumped into a truck. I pulled a woman up. I saved her life. I think people died there."

"It is OK," the sheik says. "It is OK if you touched the woman."

"No, no. I was not asking that. I wanted to tell you that I almost died today."

"Well, it is over now," he says, without emotion. Then he leaves me at the tent.

However deadly and frantic Jamarat is, it can't be worse than what I've just seen. Though I haven't slept in thirty-six hours, nothing matters now but completing this hajj. I step inside my tent and stare at my fellow pilgrims lying on a rug. Half of them have already gone to Jamarat and returned. They eat oranges or sleep blissfully on mats in the hot, cramped tent. The rest are waiting until evening, when Jamarat is safer.

I decide to go right now. I have lost all my fear. Along with Shakeel Shareef, the Pennsylvania doctor, and a few other pilgrims, I march to Jamarat in the midday heat, collecting pebbles along the way. The streets are congested, but we weave through the crowds. We watch a pilgrim coming back from Jamarat. He is bandaged and bleeding from the head, his *ihram* robes covered in blood.

We wander into a crowd of more than a million people. A couple hundred thousand pilgrims are striding on the overpass above. "Everyone is taking the overpass," says Shakeel, pointing. "The bottom level is safer."

We follow him, making our way through the rushing crowds to the smallest pillar to throw our seven stones, but we are too far away. Shakeel is not like so many other careless pilgrims. He will not throw at the first opportunity; he waits until he is certain he will not hit another person. I watch him, banged upon by rushing hajjis, measuring his throw, stopping, moving closer. I stand behind him, my hand on his shoulder, so that we stay together.

"We have to get closer," Shakeel shouts. "If we throw from here, we'll only be hitting pilgrims. Hurry."

We link arms and march into a wall of pilgrims. Hundreds of tiny pebbles pound against the sides of a granite pillar in little bursts of dust.

Right after Shakeel throws his last pebble, he is almost pushed down by a throng of Pakistanis. I grab him and pull him away from the scene. We run through the riotous crowd until we are outside again, safe, in the sun.

As we approach our camp, I turn and watch the arcing, sunwashed, overcrowded Jamarat overpass receding behind the tents. As I wander back, I realize I've made peace with the hajj and with this rough, beautiful, holy place. Everything I have suffered seems almost necessary, because I am overcome with an unutterable serenity. How is it that, by some miracle, so many people can exist in the same small place at once?

We reach our camp, shave our heads, shower, change out of our *ihram* robes into *jallabeyah* robes, roll out our mats, and sleep hard on the Mina dirt.

CHARLES MARTIN KEARNEY

Maps and Dreaming

FROM *The Missouri Review*

Night in New Delhi

SUZANNE AND I were nearing the end of a journey together that had taken us overland through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. On the front steps of a hotel in New Delhi, I waited for a taxi among shirtless, mostly sleeping baggage men. My documents and belongings were packed. The hotel restaurant had air conditioning, and moneychangers — the grifters and hawkers who made Asia possible and impossible — had already grouped together close to its locked entrance, smoking cheroots, aloof, edgy, and as watchful and nervous as birds. An oxcart stacked with bundles of cotton scraps passed us in the street. Early morning cooking fires, tended by squatters, tribes of sick and poor, provided checkpoints of light close to ground. Overhead, slow blue clouds hid the moon.

It was about 3:30 A.M. and unseasonably warm even for late July. In the room upstairs I had showered, shaved, and dressed in European clothes. The manager of the hotel had brought me a copy of the *Herald Tribune* and a serving of coffee. I was awake enough but tired and thinking about Suzanne. We had met in Greece, when she was still undecided about her plans; she thought that she wanted a bodyguard for her trip through Central Asia, and I had gone with her, giving up for the summer my idea of crisscrossing the Near East, destined for Israel. We had gotten involved and for about three months had been close, starting in Athens, then Istanbul, Tehran, Lahore, and New Delhi. Now she was going on without me, riding the trains to Nepal, temporarily half blind.