



A Fort of Nine Towers: An Afghan Family Story

Qais Akbar Omar

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One of the rare memoirs of Afghanistan to have been written by an Afghan, *A Fort of Nine Towers* reveals the richness and suffering of life in a country whose history has become deeply entwined with our own.

For the young Qais Akbar Omar, Kabul was a city of gardens where he flew kites from his grandfather's roof with his cousin Wakeel while their parents, uncles, and aunts drank tea around a cloth spread in the grass. It was a time of telling stories, reciting poetry, selling carpets, and arranging marriages. Then civil war exploded. Their neighborhood found itself on the front line of a conflict that grew more savage by the day.

With rockets falling around them, Omar's family fled, leaving behind everything they owned to take shelter in an old fort—only a few miles distant and yet a world away from the gunfire. As the violence escalated, Omar's father decided he must take his children out of the country to safety. On their perilous journey, they camped in caves behind the colossal Buddha statues in Bamyan, and took refuge with nomad cousins, herding their camels and sheep. While his father desperately sought smugglers to take them over the border, Omar grew up on the road, and met a deaf-mute carpet weaver who would show him his life's purpose.

Later, as the Mujahedin war devolved into Taliban madness, Omar learned about quiet resistance. He survived a brutal and arbitrary imprisonment, and, at eighteen, opened a secret carpet factory to provide work for neighborhood girls, who were forbidden to go to school or even to leave their homes. As they tied knots at their looms, Omar's parents taught them literature and science.

In this stunning coming-of-age memoir, Omar recounts terrifyingly narrow escapes and absurdist adventures, as well as moments of intense joy and beauty. Infused with folktales, steeped in poetry, *A Fort of Nine Towers* is a life-affirming triumph.

A *Washington Post* Notable Nonfiction Book of 2013

A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Nonfiction Book of 2013

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