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The moment I stepped down from the plane, the Asian heat smacked me in the face. Sweat beaded on my forehead, but I left my jacket on—my attempt at modesty in this country where women wore scarves over their chests and covered their ankles. We stood outside in a disjointed line in front of a small concrete structure that I assumed was the airport. Men in punjabis spoke heatedly into their cell phones, and women in hijabs and long burkas took selfies while they waited. I pushed damp strands of travel-bedraggled hair off my forehead. Could I survive in this heat for six months?

Forcing my tired body upright, I shifted my backpack from one shoulder to the other. The line moved slowly toward the doorway of the terminal. Finally, I was close enough to step into a small office where a fan cooled my sticky face. An olive-skinned official stood inside the doorway, pointing a laser thermometer at each of us as we walked through. He aimed it at my forehead and glanced at the temperature display before waving me on toward the desk at the back of the room.

Another official awaited me there, a woman with smooth tan skin wearing a professional white coat, her head swathed