for my family you are my نورونفس

for my mountains Alborz and Dena, when this book was published you were in the second grade, I was in the second grade when the war started. How many pomegranate seeds are we different from one another? Too many, one might say. Not too many, if we think of our world as one big country.

for my friends, without you this journey would have been impossible.

for my people, may you live in peace someday.
And for all the war children in the world.
AN INTRODUCTION

Every experience we have is as unique as it is universal. Pantea Amin Tofangchi’s memoir-in-poems is about a very specific war—the Iran–Iraq War that lasted from September 1980 to August 1988—and it is experienced from the singular perspective of an Iranian girl; yet it speaks to shared experience through the very engine of its specificity. How does a child live through something as devastating as war? How does a child live through any trauma? Quite simply, she lives. She eats. She sleeps. She goes to school. She even plays. She folds the fabric of the trauma into her daily life, and carries it into adulthood and the world.

*Memory has a face,* she says, and in reading Pantea’s childhood remembrances of acacia trees and the turquoise of the Persian Gulf, I’m reminded of syringa trees and the azure of the Atlantic Ocean in Southern Africa. When she writes, *Like petals / or wildflowers in the mountain / some of our friends just left / to live in other lands,* I think of how in time—in different ways—so did we, she and I.

Her leaving was to turn away from war, from the oppression of women, from uprisings violently subdued by her government. My turning away was more ephemeral; it was from remorse and shame for a government that devised the word and ethos of *apartheid.* Yet, for all our difference, Pantea and I found
commonality in our outsider-insider status—our *apartness*—as naturalized Americans in our adopted country.

For both of us, our leaving was predicated on having come of age in our dysfunctional countries.

But, as Pantea’s grandfather tells her, *There is no such thing / as an easy country.* This is true of Iran, of South Africa, of America, of any country. And to read how Pantea’s young life was *Glazed With War* is to lend perspective to every war, like the latter-day conflict in Ukraine, and to share her outrage:

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    Nobody admitted the mistake.
    Politicians usually don’t.
    That war was not a mistake.
    This war isn’t either!
    These wars aren’t
    The ones that haven’t happened yet,
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In each observation, Pantea opens the door to empathy. As I have felt its resonance, so you will find your own.

Judith Krummeck, 2023
writer | broadcaster | immigrant
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Many things in the world have already happened. You can go back and tell about them. They are part of what we own as we speed along through the white sky.”

—William Stafford

بنی آدم اعضای یک دیگرند،
که در آفرينش ز یک گوهنده,
چو عضوی به یاد آوردن روزگار,
دگر عضوها را مانده قرار
تو گذ مینهت دیگران به غمی,
نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

—Saadi
MY MAHOGANY PALACE
A PRELUDE:

_to all the war-children in the world_

so I flew back in time

again

to the loud noises
the cracks
the masking tapes
to the candlelight flashlight
to my father’s small black radio
to our basement filled
with cans dry fruits tissues blankets batteries
water bottles towels soap bars band-aids medicines
along with agony worry and broken hearts
to a black war and a gray peace —

under the mahogany dining table
I hear my heavy breathing when the attacks were starting
I remember
I let the air fly to my lungs with my eyes closed
I remember the smell
of the big dark-brown blanket
my mother would throw over the table
so the light of the flashlight wouldn’t show through
no light after dark in our Tehran
not even a spark
not from any house
no street lamps
not even a lightening bug
where were the stars
the moon and shooting stars
I wonder —

eight years old I was
under the dining table under the big brown blanket

doing
my homework
holding
the red and white flashlight
my parents still have it

this is jang it may last 10 years they have to sleep in their rooms
my father said slowly

I looked at them quietly
through the part my mom left open
for air to flow
the mattresses already
waiting for us to dive in
my mom was covering them with sheets
this isn’t just war
said my mom with a shaky voice

_This is marg and_

_If we have to die I want us to die together_

she said

and I saw two giant pearls falling down her cheek

taking the red pencil out of my little sister’s
little hand

I whispered

_natars natars don’t be afraid don’t be afraid_

_she is not crying she is just allergic to the dust_

I lied

and I put the red pencil on her innocent flower on the white paper

    _when is this war going to end_

I asked my dad

_never_ he whispered to himself so suddenly

    he turned toward me
and kissed my forehead

_soon baba joon_

    _soon_
GLAZED WITH WAR
IN SECOND GRADE

The war started
and we carried it
like an unexpected rain
weighted down wet and thick
we carried ourselves every morning
heavy,
firebrick in our backpacks.

It was there,
part of our routine:
anti-aircraft sounds,
sirens, تصمیم گیری
fear, حسنک کجایی
bombs and death.

But at eight
 carrying a bag filled
with pencils: red and black
eraser, pencil sharpener, ruler
napkins and a foldable cup
an apple, feta cheese and walnut sandwich
along with war
was normal to me.
CARTOON TIME

Again?!

everyday
the power outage
along with the stupid
war
has to happen on
cartoon time?

I exclaimed to my mom!

I wish . . .
(the sound of anti-aircraft guns were loud, so I started to yell)

can't they just bomb
in the mornings?
THE BLUE HEADLIGHT

The cars
aren’t made with pale blue
headlights.
Later, I learned that
people painted them blue
so the enemy couldn’t
spot them from thousands of miles away.
THE MASKING TAPE

Today
all our school windows
are decorated
with masking tape
thick grayish brown
X
on all windows
keeps us safe, says the teacher
from shattered glass
in case the bomb misses the school and
the sound wave doesn’t.
I think حسن آقا
did them all.
He does everything,
from plumbing to changing the light bulb.
We are safe now.


THE EGLANTINE ROSE

at eight
supposedly innocent,
we would walk back home
from school often
in groups of five or six

which one seemed more important
to an eight-year-old girl with cream and brown school uniform?

the house whose front yard door was covered
with pink Eglantine Roses

or a woman yelling
*kids it’s red siren, run to your houses*

I stopped,
to steal a rose for my mama.