



My Father's Rifle: A Childhood in Kurdistan

Hiner Saleem

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A young Kurd comes of age in a war-torn land.

This beautiful, spare narrative tells of the life of a boy named Azad--in fact the author, a Kurdish filmmaker--as he grows to manhood in Iraq during the 1960s and 1970s. Azad is born into a vibrant village culture, to a family that is proud of its Kurdish past and hopes for a free Kurdish future. He loves his mother's orchard, his cousin's stunt pigeons, his father's old Czech rifle, his brother who is fighting in the mountains. But before he is even of school age, Azad has experienced strafing and bombing; he watches as friends and neighbors are assassinated; and he sees his father humiliated when he tries to get food for his starving family. Forced into a refugee camp in Iran for years, his family realizes, on their return, that Saddam Hussein and his regime are destroying the autonomy he had promised their people. In a burst of adolescent impatience, Azad briefly runs off to the mountains to fight for Kurdish liberty, like his brother.

But Azad has also discovered art--drawings, poetry, film--and he senses that he must find his own way to advance the Kurdish cause. *My Father's Rifle* ends with his heartbreaking departure from his parents and flight across the Syrian border to freedom. Stunning in its unadorned intensity, *My Father's Rifle* is a moving portrait of a boy who embraces the land and culture he loves, even as he leaves them.

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