



I am sitting with my sister in our home in Orange County. My family had been in the U.S. for about four years. I think I look like I've got this place figured out.

Siamak Vossoughi was born in Tehran, Iran in 1972 and lived in London, Orange County, and Seattle growing up. He attended the University of Washington, majoring in English. He moved to San Francisco in 1994, in no small part because of an appreciation for the city's literary history. He has been writing, and working at a small private school, since. He is currently seeking to publish his first book of short stories.

THE X-250

Siamak Vossoughi
Siamak Vossoughi

Vasos, the Greek, would give the okay to buy supplies, but the men still had to sign off with Mr. Rezai, the Iranian who kept the books, and in order to do that they had to tell him that they were against a war on Iran.

Mr. Rezai hadn't started it. It was George, one of the Irishmen. He had seen Mr. Rezai and thought he'd looked very small and lonely up in his little office, so by way of greeting, he'd said, "No war on Iran! I need a signature."

Mr. Rezai had melted, like a man falling in love, only in a movie that was too sentimental to be believed. George had never seen him look that way before. He was an orderly man who liked things a certain way. Later George had told the other fellows, "I saw a man's soul today." They had wanted to see it too, so they had begun to say it, and now Mr. Rezai expected it each time.

"What about Greece?" Vasos said.

"No war on Greece either."

He smiled. "Fair enough."

Mr. Rezai hadn't thought that anybody cared. There were two Americas for him. There was the America in the newspaper that pointed an accusing finger at him. And there was the America of his

job, where he could put his head down and do his work and just be one of the fellows at Owen's Carpentry & Paint. Everybody there was from somewhere, and they would joke and laugh as a way of remembering home.

They didn't know how much it meant, he thought. The America of the newspaper acted like it was bigger, but the America of George and the other fellows joking with him was the one that stuck with him on the way home. Okay, so they were Irish. They were closer to American than he was.

They didn't know how much he saw when they said it. He saw every child in Iran growing up and every mother and father looking at them proudly, the way he looked at his daughter proudly when she got awards in school. It was a rosy way to look at things, but what was so bad about a rosy way to look at things once in a while?

There was one day that George was in a hurry and his mind was also very far away because his wife had told him that morning that she was pregnant with their first child, and he forgot to say it when he went up to see Mr. Rezai in his little office. Mr. Rezai looked up at him a couple of times as he was signing the slip.

He could see that George's mind was elsewhere. He couldn't help thinking that it was a bad sign, though. It gave the America of the newspaper a little more sway on his drive home.

Once a week, when his wife worked late at the hair salon, Mr. Rezai's daughter came to his office and did her homework after school. She was there the next time he heard George coming up the stairs, and Mr. Rezai thought, he'll remember to say it this time.

But George came in and saw them and felt the weight of his future, and as he looked at Mr. Rezai at his desk and his daughter at a little table, he wondered if he would ever look as sure in the world as that.

Mr. Rezai signed the slip very slowly. He was hoping that his daughter would see how he had that other America. She was eleven years old and she was starting to see that America of the newspaper. He was hoping that she would see how he had that other one in a proud way, in a way that respected her and all that she would grow up to be. She was not in Iran, but a war would do its damage to her too, once

she understood it, which would be right away. An eleven-year-old girl was good about understanding war right away, he was learning.

George took the slip and said thanks and began to hurry away.

Mr. Rezai felt a sudden focus and determination. It was a clarity and sureness that he had not possessed until he became a father.

“No war on Ireland!” he called out after George.

George stopped and turned and smiled. “No war on Iran,” he said.

Mr. Rezai looked at his daughter. He had never seen her eyes so big, and so full of recognition and wonder. It was as though she was thinking: Finally, men talking about something that matters.

“Is America going to have a war against Ireland?” she asked her father.

“No,” Mr. Rezai said.

“Are they going to have a war against Iran?”

“Maybe.”

“Why?”

“They don’t know what war is.”

“How come they don’t know?”

“When a person is young like you, they know that war is bad. But when they get older, some people go back to war because it is the old thing, and they can’t see the new thing any more.”

“How come they can’t see it?”

“Well, there are a lot of other things around them that are old, so they start to think that everything is old. Some people even start to become proud that they think everything is old.”

George watched and thought of the first time he had wished no war on Iran to Mr. Rezai, and how he had melted, and how George had told the other fellows that he’d seen a man’s soul today. He’d seen his soul but he hadn’t seen all of it. Half of it was melting but half of it was stone.

“Why do you say no war on Ireland then?”

“Because George is my friend.”

“But you said it’s not going to happen anyway.”

“We want to remember that it’s not going to happen. We want to remember so that it doesn’t get old.”

“Okay,” Mr. Rezai’s daughter said.

Mr. Rezai smiled at George. This is how it is, he was saying. You work and work to understand the world and, at your best, you have a chance of finding an answer that is just satisfactory enough for your daughter to say okay and go back to doing her homework.

George was drinking coffee with the other men on the shop floor the next time Mr. Rezai's daughter came in.

"No war on Ireland," she said. She went upstairs.

"Ireland?" James said. "Who wants to have a war on Ireland?"

"Not her," George said. "Didn't you hear?"

"Why's she saying it then?"

"She's trying to remember. She's trying to remember no war on Ireland. I have to remember it too. I'm going to be a father."

James and the other Irishmen stood remembering.

It *was* a thing to make a man melt, George thought. At least when it was said to him by an eleven-year-old girl. It didn't matter if there was a chance of war or not.

He realized he'd forgot to say it back to her though. So as the men were finishing their coffee and getting ready to go back out to the house on Jackson Street, George said, "Just a minute. I have to sign off on an X-250."

He had no idea what he was going to say if any of the men asked him what an X-250 was. But there was a clarity and sureness with which he said it that made him feel like he could come up with something.

None of the men asked.

"Okay," James said. "Meet you in the truck."

George walked upstairs. He wished there *was* a thing called an X-250 that he was going upstairs for, instead of an eleven-year-old girl to whom he had to wish no war on her country. It would be a nice tool to have, whatever it was.

He knocked on Mr. Rezai's door. Mr. Rezai was sitting at his desk and his daughter was sitting at the little table.

"Forgot to mention," George said. "No war on Iran."

Mr. Rezai's daughter looked up from her homework, very happy. George thought she looked exactly the way an eleven-year-old girl should.

He thought he would like to make his daughter look like that some day. He would like to do it without war.

But it was worth it to make somebody *else's* daughter look like that for now. It was better than an X-250.

George went back downstairs and got in the truck.

“You got the slip?” James said.

“It was my mistake,” George said. “I don’t need it after all.”

James leaned back in the truck, content that they already had the necessary tools for the job.

After that George and Mr. Rezai always greeted each other by wishing no war on each other’s countries. If Vasos was around, they made sure to wish no war on Greece too.

