

MEWAN

From Father to Daughter

You don't understand, my child,
I went through it
I hope you won't.

While going on family trips
he used to tell us:
This is the mountain Gcheshka,
here I fought.
Here your uncle Sardar died.

We carried while
eating, sleeping,
dancing, and crying
the Kalashnikov and its bullets.
We were ready to fight.

Kurdistan is the haven of the Middle East
It is safe, safe, it is.
Our Kurdistan
it will never happen again.

Deep inside I knew he was still grieving,
day and night,
but they made it safe for us.

We can now use our pens
and change History.
We don't have two oceans,
protecting us.
Will there come a day when
I need to know how to use his Kalashnikov?

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Before Mewan moved to Holland, she didn't know languages other than Kurdish existed. Dutch came as a surprise. On the first day of school, her sister came to her crying, hungry. The two girls had food in their backpacks, but they didn't know where the backpacks had been hung. Mewan, not knowing a word in Dutch, started changing out letters in the Kurdish word for backpack, *zanta*. Different letters, different emphasis: she tried every permutation she could think of, hoping someone would understand.

Mewan's life has been "move, move, adapt, get to know new people." Born in Iran, she spent

her young years between various cities in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), fleeing Saddam's agents and soldiers as well as members of rival political parties. When she was eight, she and her family followed her father, who had gone ahead sick and in danger, to Holland. Seven years later, a teenager, she returned to the KRG where she attended AUIS. "Everywhere I've been," she says, "I have friends and memories, but I don't really have a home."

The Dutch called her Kurdish. The Kurds call her European. She doesn't let it bother her. "I have all the perspectives of all the people I am. The more pieces I have inside me, the more I can relate to different people." She is, as her name labels her, a visitor among various cultures, languages, and lands. Her parents didn't, as some do, name her *Awara*, "refugee." They chose the gentler *Mewan*, "visitor." She grew up not understanding, but as an adult, she sees: she is always standing on someone else's ground.

All the change she has been through has made her mind flexible. She doesn't like to speak; she can see too many sides to an argument, too many perspectives on each issue. She doesn't trust straight lines. She doesn't want to hurt others with the positions she holds or the sides she takes: "There is truth in every side, every story. You can't simply follow one side, one story." As a member of a high-profile political family, she also falls under public scrutiny. When she speaks with others, she represents more than herself: they see her as her family. Her uncle, her

mother, her father will all be judged by her actions and speech. "When I talk," she says, "I feel filter one, filter two, filter three. In poetry, I'm free. I try. I write."

She began writing poetry when she signed up for a poet's hike to the top of a mountain that hosts at its plateau a five-hundred-year-old castle. When she showed up in ballet flats, skinny jeans, a silk blouse, and a headband of rosettes, no one thought she would make it far. Instead, she was the only girl who reached the castle. There, among the ruins and a few grazing cows, she began to write. "Poetry wasn't something I expected. It was something that happened. I am glad it happened."

Photograph by Erin Trieb