

**M**y mother escaped Iran with my brother and me in 1987. I was seven years old and my brother was just shy of six. We were political refugees and spent nearly a year trying to get to America, our fates poised in the pens of suited men behind large desks. While our mother shielded us from much, we were witnesses nevertheless. One day in Vienna, inside a hotel converted into single-room apartments for political refugees, my brother closed the refrigerator door too hard and overturned a pot of boiling water onto himself. After several surgeries in the U.S., he still bears the scar on his right arm. What was once a mountain of extra meat that bubbled and ridged along his forearm has, over the years, been sanded into smooth dunes. I bear other kinds of scars.

Often, I imagine the man I would have become had my mother stayed put. She talks of this often, convinced that in Iran, I would have become a doctor and not a writer. Perhaps she is right. But there is no way to know the other scars I would bear. These are questions that can never be answered, and as immigrants, our lives are filled with them, the *what ifs* and *if only I had*s. It's fantastical and dangerous.

“The Hate” is a story of return and facing that other possibility of self.



It is a chapter of my current novel (*May This Be Your Last Sorrow*) and has existed in many forms over the years. I finally realized it when I understood that my protagonist could have been one of those boys hung in the middle of a public square. This is a thing he should be most grateful for from his mother. But because they cannot speak to one another in such a way, this gratitude, this saving of a life, is never articulated.

—Mehdi Tavana Okasi