



## ★ **Everything Sad Is Untrue: A True Story**

**Daniel Nayeri**

Levine Querido (Aug 25, 2020)

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“A patchwork story is the shame of a refugee,” says twelve-year-old Daniel, an Iranian refugee in Oklahoma with his sister, mother, and stepfather. The tale of what brought him to the buckle of the Bible Belt, to Tornado Alley and bullying kids, twists magically across countries, through religions, and around Persian history and myth, resulting in *Everything Sad Is Untrue*, a story of heartbreak and resilience.

Nayeri presents himself as a tween Scheherazade, telling stories to spoiled despotic children who rule the schoolyard. In these stories, he brings together what he can remember from his life in Iran—where his father was a beloved dentist, his mother a doctor, and his grandfathers were imposing men. Every story intersects with history from a 6,000 year old culture. The circuitous nature of his storytelling alienates his classmates, making him even more of an outsider, unable to piece together who he is and who he wants to be.

The narration is by turns wounded, hopeful, funny, and angry. Daniel tries to say what he knows to be true, about everything from poop to blood to the food that people eat. He catalogs what a twelve-year-old boy notices—including a pretty girl with a mean heart and a short, round father with winning ways—as a way to better understand himself. He grows in his ability to understand people—including his mother, whose drive moves them from Islam to Christianity, from Iran to the UAE to Italy, and finally to the US. She is the unstoppable force whom he comes to see clearly by the book’s end.

Daniel also reveals the character of every setting, from Iran’s tiled homes to Italy’s refugee camps, through small details of plenty and austerity alike, just how they impact a child. Poignant and powerful, *Everything Sad Is Untrue* brings alive the patchwork that becomes not shame, but a vivid carpet in the right hands.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (July / August 2020)

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