“Tears of Rain”

By Sienna Mae Heath

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**October 27, 2010**

“It’s about time we stopped them,” Elaine said.

The little television set in the booth of the college cafeteria shone in unison with the dozens and dozens of others on campus.

“They would have declared war on us if we hadn’t done it first. They could have destroyed our country with all that nuclear power if we hadn’t taken a stand.”

Nervously tossing her auburn hair from side to side, Norah said, “Who’s ‘we’?”

“Well, us,” Elaine said.

“And who’s ‘they’?” Norah said.

“Well, the Iranians,” Elaine said.

Norah tilted her high cheek bones toward the closest window and solemnly finished her ham and cheese wrap.

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**Late Spring, 1979**

Pictures of the Ayatollah flooded the streets of Iran. A little boy misunderstood the pictures of the fanatic dictator as those of his grandfather. Raha’s parents and Raha herself decided it was time for her to leave. She didn’t want her future children mistaking the Ayatollah for their grandfather.
Her mother didn’t like to cry. It wasn’t her style, she always said. She was the strong pillar of the family of nine. The pillar stayed standing in the doorway of the house and calmly and lovingly waved goodbye to her only daughter, who was leaving home the spring after her college graduation.

Raha’s father liked to walk, everywhere. He walked two and a half miles to work everyday of his life. Well, almost everyday. The airport was less than a mile from their large ornate house, which all the neighborhood children and adults deemed their second home. Raha and her dad, her beloved Baba, carried her bags on their backs, giggling like children running away from home. But her Baba wasn’t running away. Only she could. Maybe she’d be back, she thought.

They laughed not to cry and held hands as they walked down Esfahan Boulevard one last time.

Raha did not have a veil to take off on the plane. There were a few ladies who removed theirs as they settled in their seats. Some veils were prettier than others, she noticed. There were veils with paisleys, with lace classily placed around the edges, with distinct colors like soft rose pink, turquoise blue, saffron yellow, stained crimson, and chocolate brown. Sometimes these designs even matched the ladies’ shoes and purses. There were others who wore dimmed veils of black and grey. Most of these veils stayed on for a very long time.

She didn’t talk to anyone on the plane. She sat quietly, pretending to read a book that her cousin lent her. She suddenly reverted back to those long lost times in grade school when she was shy.
The airport was sunny. Raha laughed aloud as the rain dripped on her face, covering and comforting her tears. She walked from the airplane to the door of the airport with her two carry-on bags dripping with memorable knickknacks.

“Raha!” Her sister-in-law called to every person with a veil. She hadn’t seen Raha since the play in her middle-school auditorium. Raha giggled and took a moment to lovingly watch her sister-in-law make a fool out of herself. At last, her oldest brother Nader playfully grabbed her hand, and paused. “What kind of tears are those?”

“Tears of rain, baraadar! What kind are those?”

“Tears of rain.”

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She called her home in the capital of Iran from a payphone in the airport in New York City. One of the neighborhood kids answered the phone.

“It’s Rahaaaeeeéééé!”

She felt as if all those veils that she saw on the plane were weighing her down one paisley at a time.

“Raha, joon!” her mother said.

And the black and grey veils disappeared, leaving nothing but an assortment of color on her face.

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*Early Spring, 1985*

“Deary, I can’t believe you didn’t even wear a veil at your own wedding! This is the only wedding you’ve ever had, and you didn’t even wear that gorgeous ivory veil we
saw in the store. Against your olive skin, oh, you would have looked gorgeous. It’s not like you never wore a veil before! Do you miss home?”

Raha paused, lifted one eyebrow slightly, tilted her head, and shifted back into a knowing smile after only a moment.

“Actually I’ve never worn one.”

October 27, 1995

Norah skipped into her kindergarten class. You could never miss that girl in a crowd. Her mother had let her dress herself since she could crawl. An independent creature, Norah rarely admitted that it was her mother’s inspiration that really got her up and dressed her in the morning.

“Why does your mom talk like that?” said Jimmy, a freckled chubby face with glasses as thick as a soda bottle.

“Talk like what?” Norah asked.

“Like she’s an alien!” Caroline, Jimmy’s twin sister, said.

“Are you an alien?” Jimmy said.

Norah turned her head toward the craft table, where her best friend Miranda was making them matching friendship bracelets with plastic red and turquoise beads.

“I think they’re both aliens. Why else would she dress like one?” Caroline said to her brother.

“Hey!” Miranda chimed in.

“What?” the soda bottle twins said.
“I’m an alien too, so I have superb hearing capabilities,” Norah’s best friend said. Norah and Miranda stuck up their noses.

“Those are some big words there, aliens! Aliens, why don’t you go back to where you came from?” Jimmy said.

“I’m from everywhere!” Norah screamed playfully, yet with tears in her eyes.

Mrs. Lavenberg took Norah by the wrist and looked her straight in the eyes.

“Little girl, you better lower your voice or I will send you back to where you came from!”

Norah always came home from school to see her daddy painting. Always painting. He painted a picture of her once, and after that she approved of his obsession.

“Your mom is making rice and gravy tonight,” Leonard told his daughter with a sparkle in his eye.

“And . . . stuffed grape leaves?!” Norah hoped.

“We have plenty of stuffed grape leaves, my little girl. Remember, from your birthday?”

“Oh. Right.”

Leonard looked up from his obsession and toward his daughter.

For her fifth birthday, all three of them spent hours in the kitchen preparing. All her friends were coming to celebrate and there wasn’t a moment to waste. Norah and her parents had made all of her mother’s specialties, but most importantly, Norah’s favorite: stuffed grape leaves. Some of her friends had stuck their fingers down their throats and ran out of the house looking for potato chips.
Late Spring, 2007

Norah found herself in a sea of pearly white. Miranda and a few of their best girlfriends tackled her with a hug. They fell to the damp green ground in their white caps and gowns, and laughed. It was finally here, the day they had been dreaming of since their first day of Kindergarten.

Norah’s parents, meanwhile, had the video camera rolling and got the whole giggle-fit between their daughter and her best friends. Miranda hugged Norah again, just the two of them, and they clasped each other’s hands, their friendship bracelets of red and turquoise clicking together as they swung arms.

“Your speech was great, Nor.”

“You especially liked the part when I thanked my best friend, didn’t you?” Norah giggled.

“Yeah, that was my favorite part!” Miranda said with a bashful smile.

“It was my favorite part, too.” Norah said.

Raha put her arm around her daughter’s broad shoulders and said, “Hey Miss Salutatorian, can I get a picture?”

Norah blushed and smiled, with a few tears rolling down her rosy freckled cheeks. Miranda took a picture of Leonard and Raha with their daughter, the Salutatorian of Pleasant Valley High School’s class of 2007. They lived in a small town in Pennsylvania, so the high school’s class size was under a hundred students. Still, Leonard and Raha couldn’t contain how proud and happy they were for their only daughter. Norah put her arms around each of her parent’s waist. Norah’s auburn hair matched her father’s wavy red hair, which was mostly silver by then. Her cheekbones, covered with millions of tiny
freckles, arched like her mother’s cheekbones, high and prominent, which made Norah and Raha always seem to be smiling. Miranda pressed the button to take the picture of the happy family of three.

“Where’s your mom, Miranda?” Raha said.

“She’s running late from work. Her boss at the new restaurant really likes her, and keeps her late some days. But she promised we’d go out for ice cream later tonight.” Miranda looked down at her small hands and cracked her knuckles, her curly brown hair covering her olive skin.

Raha’s honey eyes found Miranda’s deep brown eyes, and said, “Well then, you’re coming to celebrate with us for a while!”

“No, really, it’s okay . . .” Miranda stuttered.

“No, really, you’re like family,” Raha said.

Miranda smiled another bashful smile and agreed to walk with them to their humble house down the street. Miranda and Norah walked across their high school football field together one last time.

That was the first day Norah ever felt just a little awkward around her best friend. There was no way she’d let Miranda walk home after graduation alone. Still, now that high school was over, she finally felt reality sink in. She was going to college on three big scholarships twenty minutes away from Pleasant Valley. Miranda was joining the Marines and would be at boot camp all the way in Texas. It all seemed so far away - high school, college, boot camp. All that seemed real was the summer of 2007 and the taste of vanilla and chocolate graduation cake.

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October 27, 2010

“Ugh, this wrap is terrible!”

Norah looked up at her friend.

Elaine pushed her lunch away, “I don’t know why I ordered this green shit. Do you wanna go to Applebee’s or something?”

Norah stared blankly at the television screen. She pulled at her lip, so that maybe she could pull the words out of her head. But she couldn’t. She was too drained to do anything. If it wasn’t for her red college sweatshirt, she would have looked like a ghost. Her eyes stayed widely open and looking at the screen until everyone left to finish their partying for the weekend. Elaine stayed though. She was a good friend, but had no idea why Norah hadn’t looked away from the television screen for twenty minutes.

“Seriously, girl. I’ve been timing you, and you haven’t looked at my face for almost a half hour. Since when do you care about politics?”

“It isn’t politics anymore. I have to go. Eat your green shit and I’ll see you later.”

Iran declared war on America. Yeah, right. America declared war on Iran. Does it matter? They were fighting, just like teenage bullies who gossip about each other in the street corners. Pushing and shoving, nagging “you started it.”

But it was so different to her. She wasn’t one of the bullies. She was both of them. Norah felt at war with herself. It was as if two halves of her body were destined to destroy each other, as two parts of the world declared war.

The countries continue to push and shove, nearly shifting the Earth off its balance, and nearly shifting her lunch out of her stomach and onto the floor.
At least it was autumn, she thought. Norah loved autumn. She could walk down Main Street and step on millions of leaves. She always liked stepping on leaves. She walked and walked and walked, abnormally disregarding her MP3 player in her bulky purse.

Walking into her dorm room, she attacked her fridge. She had been saving her mom’s rice and gravy, with those salty, crunchy tadigh potatoes for a special time. She shrugged and figured this was that time. She lay on the floor with a bag of potato chips under her left arm and her bowl of yummy goodness in her right arm.

Elaine walked in.

“This is where I’m meant to be, roomie!” Norah said.

“What have you been smoking, Norah?” Elaine joked.

Norah let out a huge sigh and fell asleep with her head in a bowl of tadigh. Elaine draped a blanket over her roommate and shook her head with a smile.

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October 28, 2010

Norah woke up the next morning to the blurred sounds of another television. She couldn’t escape the news. Iran was the new Iraq. She had random outbursts in class about her mother, the great Raha, who left during the revolution. “So if the new Iraq is Iran, the new black is green, then maybe the new 1979 is now! And we should happily greet those ‘crazy’ Iranians at the airports! They are our brothers and sisters too!”

But those same Iranians weren’t her classmates’ brothers and sisters. And it was virtually useless trying to help them understand these raging internal and external wars.
As she was walking out of her math class, where this kind of conversation was completely irrelevant, Norah opened her phone to three missed calls. She giggled to herself; her phone was always blowing up. The first call was from her mother (not unusual), the second from Miranda, the third from her cousin Arézoo in Iran.

“Hey Mom, what’s up?”

“I’m picking you up from school.”

“Why?”

“Just walk back to your room. Don’t get distracted by anything else. I need to see you.”

“Okay . . . I have my writing class later though . . . “

“Just walk back to your room. Just walk.”

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*Don’t get distracted by anything else. ...Just walk.* Maybe she should have listened.

“Arézoo! Cheh-toe-ree? How are you?”

“I need to see you.”

“Well that time will come, my cousin! One of us needs to cross the Atlantic first, huh?”

“One of us does, indeed!”

Arézoo choked over her words.

“Those damn Americans!” Norah’s cousin gasped. “I’m sorry! But those fucking Americans!”
“Since when did you learn curse words?” Norah joked through a failed attempt to provide comic relief, choking through her tears because she knew in her heart what her cousin was about to say.

Norah didn’t feel like calling Miranda back. *Those damn Americans!* Norah didn’t feel like an American. She didn’t feel like anything. The autumn air cut through her throat and took away her identity, lifting her spirit so high that she could no longer reach it. Another wave of air caught her throat as her parents’ car drove past and came to a screeching stop at Norah’s feet.

...I’m an orphan.

It was in the middle of Tehran. Arézoo walked with her parents, carrying a few groceries in plastic bags. A gust of autumn air blew Arézoo’s dark green veil off her long curly brown hair and onto an American soldier’s shoulder. The soldier scurried away from his assigned position and placed his calloused palm on Arézoo’s upper back. She held her breath with her broad lips slightly parted and turned around to face the soldier.

“You lost this, little girl?” he said.

“I . . .” she said.

“Get your hands off my daughter!” Arézoo’s mother glared, remembering the English she had learned in high school. She shouted in a high-pitched sigh, not unlike any other mother. “She is not a little girl, she is seventeen years old!”

“I’m so sorry . . .” the soldier said.

Arézoo’s father held his wife’s hand and wrapped his other arm around his daughter’s broad shoulders. He slowly raised his head to look up at the soldier, his
nostrils flaring and his slightly wrinkled face scrunched up like a frightened tiny animal. Trying his best to think in English, but feel in Farsi, he said, “Why . . . why . . . you . . . soldiers . . . here . . . in our Azadi Square?” he couldn’t help himself.

The soldier held his gun in his arms and slouched, tilting his head and smoky blue eyes away from the family. The four of them stood underneath the arched opening of 148-foot-tall white marble tower in the middle of the Azadi Square. The crowd of people coming and going began to stop and wonder why Arézoo’s family was making conversation with an American soldier in the middle of the busiest and most popular square in Iran. Within ten minutes, the soldier was surrounded by a confused angry crowd of people, demanding an answer.

“Mester! Mester! Why you here?” an elderly woman mimicked.

Masses of frightened words in Farsi shot out of hundreds of mouths, while the soldier squinted his eyes and clung to his gun, child-like, as if he was naked in a dream, hoping he would wake up in his cartoon-covered sheets.

A young college student pushed through the crowd to stand behind Arézoo’s family. He said, “Why are you here? What did we do to deserve being watched while we go about our everyday lives? Just answer me that question. How would you feel if you walked with your family through Times Square, with our soldiers lurking in the bushes?”

“Why you here?” the elderly woman said again.

The soldier placed his left palm over his mouth, still clinging to his gun in his right arm. He sheepishly kept his smoky blue eyes on the green soiled ground. More frightened words, crammed with unknown harsh sounds and consonants, pealed through
his squinted eyes. The words of the people cut through the crisp air and cut the insides of their throats as they screamed louder and louder.

“He asked you how you would feel!” Arézoo’s mother shouted, her lungs breaking, like an angry cat about to pounce, but never would.

The soldier’s right arm flinched, he released his left palm from his mouth, and said, “I don’t know, God dammit!” And the soldier flipped his gun to face the crowd of alien sounds, his eyes just barely leaving the ground. He fired a bullet into the crowd, to wherever it may land just so the popping piercing blast could wake him up from his nightmare. The bullet landed in Arézoo’s mother’s neck, the pop of the gun and the murder’s words “God dammit!” echoing three times in the bottom arched cavity of the Azadi Square’s beloved white, intricate marble tower.

Arézoo’s father caught his wife’s body in his arms, and looked in her eyes as they rolled to the back of her head. He looked up to see bullets raining from the sky, from airplanes, and screeched at the sight of Arézoo running for her life in the direction of their house a couple blocks away. He laid his wife’s dead body to rest on the ground, and laid beside her as the raining bullets orphaned Norah’s cousin. The soldier’s knees buckled, and he knelt beside them, looking up at the sky, praying to God for mercy.

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I’m an orphan. Those . . . Americans. I’m an orphan. Arézoo had said.

Norah and her parents sat on the sidewalk outside her dormitory. They shivered in the wind as the crisp brown leaves fell on their shoulders, but couldn’t bring themselves to get up and sit in the lounge on the other side of the dormitory’s front door. Norah got a text message, which she opened, as Leonard and Raha shook their heads in disbelief that
their daughter could open her phone at a time like this. It read: “So, um…Did I tell you I
got transferred out of Texas finally?” Miranda and Norah kept in touch on a regular basis,
but Miranda was never really good about updating her friends on her location…mostly
just on her social life and career in the Marines. Location in the country or on the globe
never meant much to her. Norah rolled her eyes.

“We’re going to try to bring her here. It’s not going to be easy. But we’re going to
try,” Leonard said. Raha’s words came from her husband’s mouth, as she was paralyzed
by the sight of her daughter and by the ringing sound of Arézoo’s voice in her head.

“I’m an orphan,” Norah muttered.

“Stop saying that! You are NOT an orphan! Can’t you see us?”

Norah’s eyes said it again. Her eyes saw her parents, and saw them with love. The
nuclear explosions never ceased behind those eyes.

“We think it’s best to take you home for a few days. Do you want to go up and get
packed?” Leonard said.

“No.” she whispered.

“What do you mean ‘no’?” Leonard said.

“I don’t need to pack anything. I have everything I need in the car.” Norah said.

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The family of three drove home. It was a silent twenty-minute car ride. The light
in the sky was beginning to dim. It was the kind of sky that looked, and felt, cold. Norah
and her parents looked wide-eyed out the windows at the blemishes of fiery blue and
orange in the sky. Leonard drove his wife and daughter up and down the winding green
mountainous roads of Pennsylvania, tackling one hill at a time, until they arrived at their humble home.

Norah marched up the stairs to the second floor of their house, and fell into a comforting pile of earthy pillows and stuffed animals on her bed. At college she had been trying to avoid every television in sight, but now that she was home, she wanted to know what the rest of America thought happened that day.

RIOT IN TEHRAN, IRAN IN THE AZADI SQUARE. ONLY ONE AMERICAN SOLDIER WAS KILLED . . .

scrolled at the bottom of the screen, as the newscaster reviewed the Northeast’s 10-day weather forecast: a slight chance of a thunderstorm tomorrow and the day after. Norah had seen and heard enough. She fell asleep on her stomach with the television blaring next to her frizzy head of thick and wavy auburn hair.

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October 29, 2010

Norah woke up unusually early in the morning to the smell of hot cocoa. Her mom always made hot cocoa when either of their spirits needed a lift. She pulled herself down the stairs and into the kitchen along the slickness of her dirty white socks and wrapped her blanket over her chest. She hugged her mom, gave her an unnecessary half-smile, and neither of them said a word as Norah took the cup of hot cocoa. Her plastic beaded friendship bracelet clicked against the ceramic cup as she walked. She slid into the living room and opened the front door to check the mailbox on the porch. For the past few days, every time she stepped out a door, she felt the air grow colder and colder.
Norah found a few household bills, an advertisement for chiffon scarves, and a bank statement of her savings account. She tossed the mail on the coffee table, as Raha sluggishly walked into the living room so they could drink their hot cocoa together and try to feel warm against the nearly November wind. Norah gulped her drink, burning the middle of her tongue. Raha sat down and looked through the mail to avoid breaking the silence. She found a postcard stuck on the back of the static pages of the advertisement, sunk in her chair a little bit more, and handed it to her daughter.

On the front, Norah saw a picture of her best friend Miranda in her Marines uniform. Miranda smiled with her head held high, standing in front of an intricate white marble tower lit up at night and shining golden in the looming dark sky.

On the back of the postcard, Norah read:

>You’ll never guess where I am now! You and your mom would be so proud of me! I saw the Azadi Square. You know, the one your mom was always raving about. It was so beautiful. Anyway, how have you been?

Love always, Miranda.

Norah held the Azadi Square in her hands. Her eyes were fixed on the postmark date: October 13, 2010. She bowed her head at the sight of her plastic friendship bracelet, the red and turquoise beads against the crafter’s post card.

Raha looked up from her warm drink and at her daughter’s bobbing head.

There was nothing to say. It was too early. It was too late.