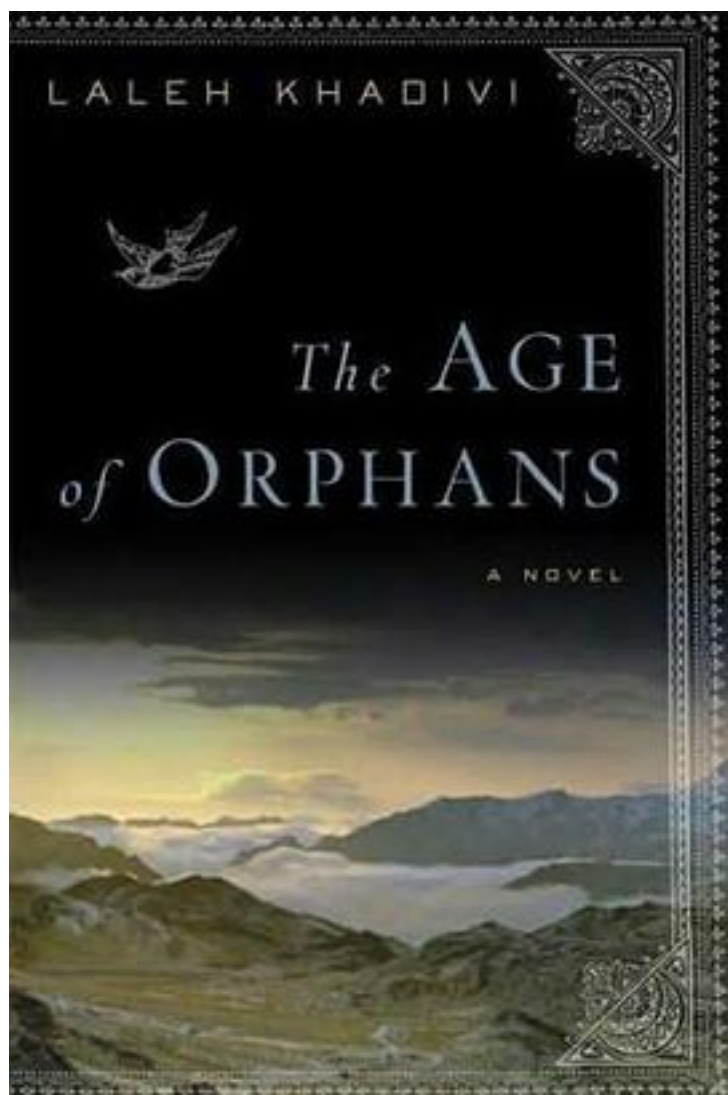


# The Age of Orphans



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The story of a Kurdish boy forced to betray his people in service of the new Iranian nation, and the tragic consequences as he grows into manhood. Before following his father into battle, he had been like any other Kurdish boy: in love with his Maman, fascinated by birds and the rugged Zagros Mountains, dutiful to his stern and powerful Baba. But after he is orphaned in a massacre by the armies of Iran's new shah, he is taken in by the very army that has killed his parents, renamed Reza Khouirdi, and indoctrinated into the modern, seductive ways of the newly minted nation, careful to hide his Kurdish origins with every step. "The Age of Orphans" follows Reza through his meteoric rise in rank, his marriage to a proud Tehrani woman, and his eventual deployment, as a colonel, back to the Zagros Mountains and the ever-defiant Kurds. Here Reza is responsible for policing, and sometimes killing, his own people, and his carefully crafted persona begins to crack. Told with an evocative richness of language that recalls Michael Ondaatje or Anita Desai, the story of Reza Khouirdi is that of the twentieth-century everyman, cast out from the clan in the name of nation, progress, and modernity, who cannot help but yearn for the impossible dreams of love, land, and home. Laleh Khadivi, winner of the 2008 Whiting Writers' Award, was born in Esfahan, Iran, in 1977, but fled with her family to the United States in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. "The Age of Orphans" is the first novel in a projected trilogy that will trace three generations of a Kurdish family--based loosely on her own--as they make their way to the United States and undergo the profound transformations of the immigrant experience. Before following his father into battle, he had been like any other Kurdish boy: in love with his Maman, fascinated by birds and the rugged Zagros Mountains, dutiful to his stern and powerful Baba. But after he is orphaned in a massacre by the armies of Iran's new shah, he is taken in by the very army that has killed his parents, renamed Reza Khouirdi, and indoctrinated into the modern, seductive ways of the newly minted nation, careful to hide his Kurdish origins with every step. "The Age of Orphans" follows Reza through his meteoric rise in rank, his marriage to a proud Tehrani woman, and his eventual deployment, as a colonel, back to the Zagros Mountains and the ever-defiant Kurds. Here Reza is responsible for policing, and sometimes killing, his own people, and his carefully crafted persona begins to crack. Told with an evocative richness of language that recalls Michael Ondaatje or Anita Desai, Laleh Khadivi's "The Age of Orphans" tells the story of a Kurdish boy forced to betray his people in service of the new Iranian nation, and the tragic consequences as he grows into manhood. It is the story of the twentieth-century everyman, cast out from the clan in the name of nation, progress, and modernity, who cannot help but yearn for the impossible dreams of love, land, and home. "This is a stunning debut . . . unflinching, gorgeously poetic, intimate yet with a wondrous sweep of history. To read the tale of Reza Khouirdi is to take a journey deep inside the darkest cavity of the heart."--Cristina Garcia, author of National Book Award finalist "Dreaming in Cuban" "Laleh Khadivi is genuinely gifted and ruthless with that gift. We are all so fortunate that she is, for it takes both talent and ruthlessness to delve this deeply into an epic life."--Dorothy Allison, author of National Book Award finalist "Bastard Out of Carolina" "In 1921 Persia, after a battlefield massacre, a Kurdish orphan is conscripted into the shah's army and given a new identity. Khadivi's debut spans almost six decades, during which the boy, renamed Reza Khouirdi by the authorities, first proves his loyalty and his brutality and then--on the ground that his knowledge of Kurdish deviousness will be invaluable--is promoted to captain and sent to his hometown, Kermanshah. Reza's task is to be ruthless in stamping out revolts. The homecoming reignites old emotions, reminds Reza of the innocent falcon-loving mama's boy he once was but can never be again--and threatens to crack his facade and cost him the authority that is his dearest, almost his only, possession. Before his return, Reza marries a Tehrani woman, Meena. Their tragic, loveless marriage yields six children, until Reza--his wife is eight months pregnant with their seventh child--one day poisons her tea. When her brothers come up from the capital and confront him with the

overwhelming evidence of his crime--Meena's blood contains cyanide, arsenic and bleach--Reza, in the book's most chilling scene, makes a ceremony of surrendering and has himself locked up by his adjutant, the jailer in the town's one cell, which has never before been used. The magistrate, another underling, takes down the brothers' evidence, laughing all the while. The next morning, Reza has himself released. The historical material has unmistakable power."--"Kirkus Reviews ""Khadivi's writing . . . is luminous in this tragic story of an 'orphan of the earth,' which is rendered in prose that is by turns graphic and poetic."--"Booklist ""The 2008 recipient of a Whiting Writers' Award, Khadivi offers a remarkable first novel that does not shy away from harsh subject matter. This first installment in a trilogy about three generations of Kurdish men is set in Persia in the 1920s as Reza Shah Pahlavi comes to power. The story tracks the life of a Kurdish boy who loses his family in a massacre and then is taken in by the very soldiers responsible for making him an orphan. Reborn as Reza Kourdi in honor of the shah, the youth is so well indoctrinated by the shah's military that his superior officers decide to reward his performance as a soldier by giving him a command post in his homeland. Reza returns to the region with his new wife to fight his own people, Kurdish rebels, and c

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