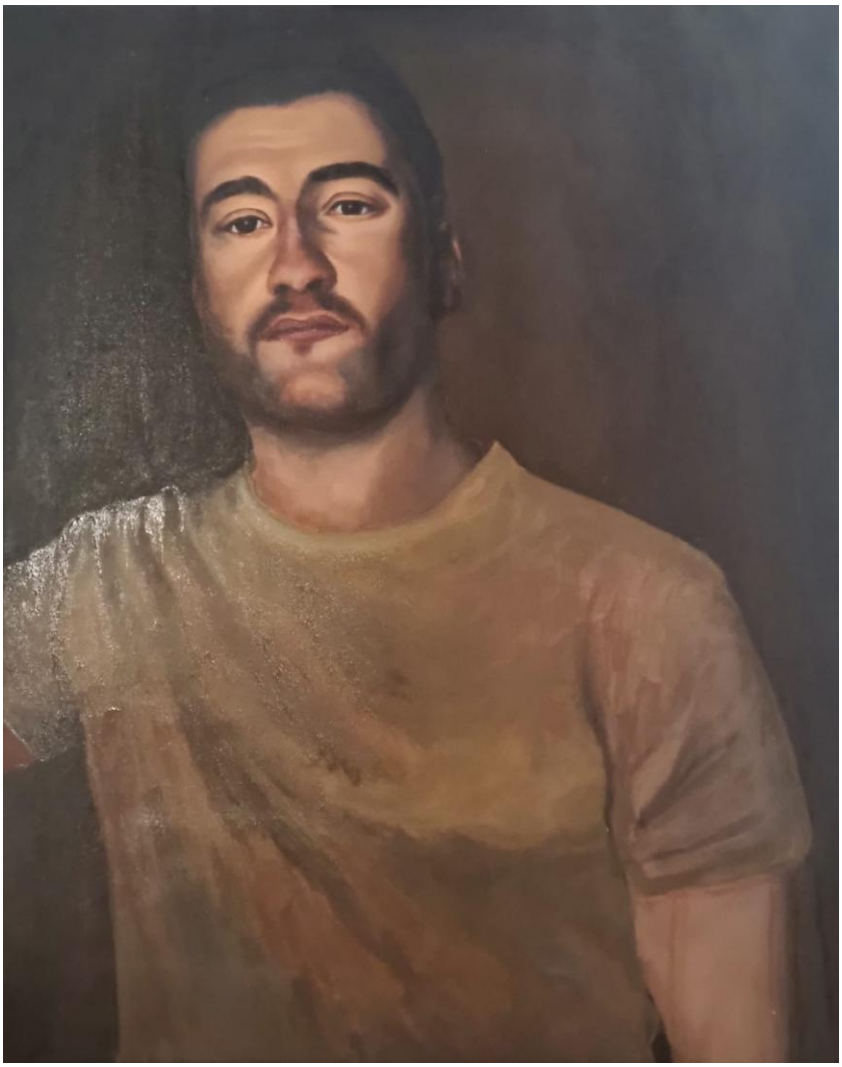
A Home for a Boy

Mostafa Faraji



Self-portrait by Mostafa Faraji. Oil painting.

Prologue

Prologue

September 2026

Some part of me is still thirteen, standing beneath the winter sky in Ilam.

Snow rests on the roofs of the houses. Beyond them, the mountains rise, their white slopes bright against the blue. As the afternoon passes, their shadows stretch across the city. I watch the light move without thinking that one day I might have to remember how it looked.

I was born in Ilam, in western Iran, and grew up in a Kurdish family. People had been making homes in that region for thousands of years, but I knew little of its history. The world I knew was small enough to walk through. It had streets that led to my friends and a door I could open without knocking. From inside, Baba called my name.

Even now, on a clear day in Melbourne, I sometimes look up and expect to see those mountains. For a moment, the open sky seems to have something missing.

Fourteen years have passed since the summer of 2012. I am an Australian artist, and Australia is home. Here in Melbourne, I have work to go to and plans for tomorrow. I understand why people tell me to leave the past behind. There are days when I wish for nothing else.

I imagine digging a hole for it. Ten metres deep. I lower everything into the darkness and cover it with soil, pressing the earth flat until there is no sign that anything lies beneath it. Then I picture an ordinary morning: getting up, making coffee, thinking only about the day ahead.

My phone rings.

Private number.

Before I answer, my hand tightens around it. Someone is trying to reach me, and I do not know who. That brief uncertainty is enough. The fear arrives before I have heard a word.

After the call, I am still standing beneath the Melbourne sky. I can feel the sun on my face. Nothing around me has changed, but I have to make an effort to notice it.

What comes back is not only the fear.

I hear Baba saying my name, and with his voice comes the house. My mother is somewhere inside. My brother is there too. Then Hamzah, and Reza, and people from other places and other years, each bringing back something I thought I had forgotten. I know I am remembering. It does not stop me wanting to turn towards them.

This is what I leave out when I imagine covering everything with soil. The things I want to forget are tangled up with the people I miss. I cannot return to a frightening day without passing through the ordinary hours before it, when someone made me laugh or called me in to eat. I want the fear to loosen its hold. I want to hear the rest of the conversation.

Sometimes I paint because I do not know how to say these things. I can stay with a face, look closely, put the brush down and come back. Writing asks me to follow the memory further. Beyond the face is a person speaking. Beyond the moment I find hardest to face are all the small things that mattered before it happened.

The summer of 2012 changed my life. But when I begin there, so much is already missing: the days when home needed no explanation, when leaving meant going out to play and coming back hungry.

So I go back a little further, to the boy beneath the winter sky. His fingers are cold. He has a game to finish. He has no idea how often I will return to find him here.

Baba calls from the house.

“I'm coming.”

I turn back to the game. There is still time.

Help me complete A Home for a Boy

My name is Mostafa Faraji. I am an Australian artist, writer and registered nurse living in Melbourne. Australia is home. I am writing A Home for a Boy about my childhood in Iran, my journey to Australia as a refugee, and the life I have built here.

The book begins with the people I knew and loved: the family who raised me, the friends I played football with, and the boy I was before I had to leave. Through his eyes, I want readers to experience those ordinary days and what happened when they ended.

I am asking for your financial support to complete A Home for a Boy and prepare the manuscript for publication. Your contribution will help me give the writing the time and care it needs and bring this story to readers.

I am grateful to artist Fiona Hall and to former soccer player and human rights advocate Craig Foster for their support of this project. Craig will also write the foreword.

If this opening has stayed with you, please consider helping me bring A Home for a Boy to its readers. Thank you for spending time with my story.

Mostafa Faraji