

# The Garden of Inside-Outside

*Written by Chiara Mezzalama*

*Illustrated by Régis Lejonc*

*Translated by Sarah Ardizzone*

Inspired by the childhood of the author, whose father was appointed Italian ambassador to Tehran in 1980, this picture book is a beautiful evocation of a country struck by war, where friendship arises despite the rising walls. In the summer of 1981, Chiara and her family join their father in Iran. At their beautiful palace, there is an inside and an outside, separated by a wall. Inside, there is a wild garden where princes and princesses used to walk. Outside, in the black city, there are soldiers with heavy boots, big beards and bombs. One day, a boy from outside climbs the wall into the garden. The garden no longer feels impenetrable but Chiara has made a friend, Massoud, who will keep the secret of the inside-outside.

**The story of an unexpected friendship of two children, on either side of war and peace**



330 x 210mm

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**BOOK ISLAND**

## INSIDE

But we were safe inside our garden. A wall protected us from the city-monster. We set off on adventures to the other end of the grounds: we were so far away from the house, we felt all alone in the world, with our rubber boots and our sticks. We chased butterflies, caught lizards and picked wild flowers for our mother.



Seeing as we didn't have any friends, we asked for a dog. And we got one! A small yellow dog who ran about with us like a mad thing. There were three of us now, and we were happy.



In the evenings, the scent of jasmine flowers would fill the garden. We ate outside, by candlelight, to the sounds of the fountains and a concert of cicadas.



# INTRODUCTION

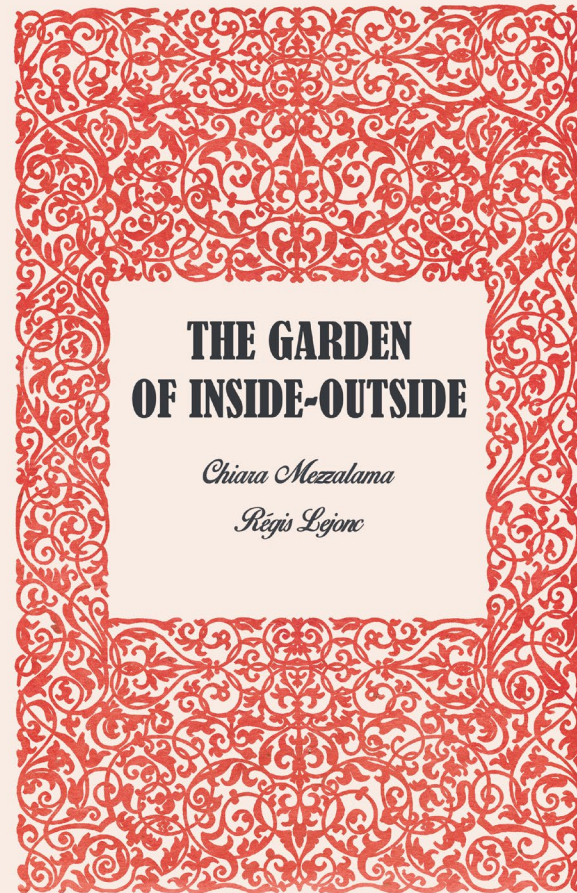
*At the beginning of 1979, after a reign of twenty-seven years, the Shah of Iran was overthrown by the Islamic Revolution and fled the country. Days later, one of his chief enemies, Ayatollah Khomeini, returned after fifteen years in exile, having spent the last few months in France. He declared himself "Guide of the Revolution" and founded the Islamic Republic of Iran. Religious authority controlled all institutions. The country descended into chaos.*

*On 4 November 1979, following an attack on the American embassy in the capital, Tehran, fifty-two American citizens were taken hostage by student supporters of Khomeini, who were demanding that the Shah return to face trial. The Americans would be held as prisoners for 484 days, during what became known as the "hostage crisis".*

*In September 1980, Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein, took advantage of Iran's political instability and decided to invade. This marked the start of a bloody war that would last ten years.*

*It was during these disturbing historical events that my father, Francesco Mezzalama, was appointed Italy's ambassador to Iran. He took up his post in Tehran at the end of November 1980, in the thick of the revolution, the hostage crisis and the war. My mother, my brother and I would join him at the embassy a few months later, for the summer of 1981. Which is where this story begins...*

*Chiara Mezzalama*



LES ÉDITIONS DES ÉLÉPHANTS

# INSIDE

## INSIDE

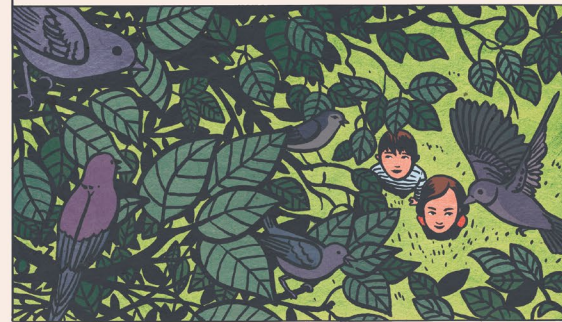
There was a garden. A garden so huge it was never-ending.  
A wild garden, where princes and princesses once lived.  
Real ones, not the sort you find in made-up stories.



That garden held memories, fountains the colour of the sky,  
pomegranate trees, tall grasses where all kinds of insect hid,  
wild flowers and a pond with a carp that was one hundred  
years old.



Tall plane trees, with leaves as big as giants' hands, provided  
shelter for the birds flying through the clouds. Those birds would  
land in the branches to take a rest and hold their conferences.  
Everywhere, the garden concealed secret corners.



# OUTSIDE

## OUTSIDE

Before our arrival, the garden had been abandoned. The princes and princesses were driven out, and the huge iron gates locked. This secret garden's city had collapsed into war, and nobody could hear the birds singing any more, or the water in the fountains. Even the leaves of the massive trees rustled in silence. Gunfire, exploding bombs and cries drowned out every sound.



The city had grown dark. So had its women and men. People queued for food. Everywhere there were soldiers with heavy boots and big beards, their rifles slung across their shoulders. The city-monster made us feel very frightened.

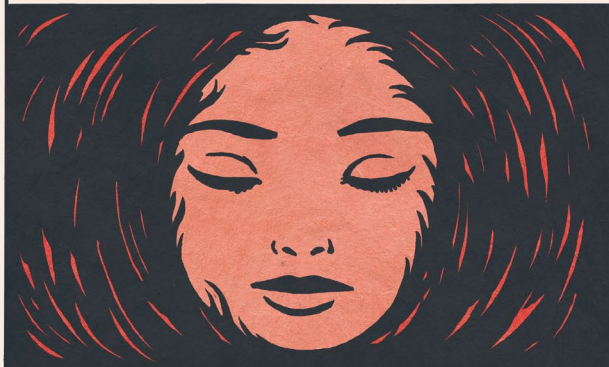


## OUTSIDE • INSIDE

"Are you mad?" my little brother wanted to know. "His father might be a revolutionary, one of the bloodthirsty beards. If it was so easy for him to climb the wall, what's to stop others? We simply have to tell the grown-ups!"



That night, I felt a little frightened: my brother was right, our protecting wall had been breached. There was no longer an inside and an outside. The city-monster was spreading its tentacles.



The next day, I set off in search of my new friend at the bottom of the garden. There he was, waiting for me, with his beaten-up shoes, his torn T-shirt, his tousled hair, his dark eyes. He was handsome.



That was when I understood how hard it was to mix inside and outside. The wall had a good side and a bad side. But who says which side of the wall you're on? Who gets to choose?



I didn't want to run down to the bottom of the garden any more. I spent my days reading, while my little brother played with the dog.



I felt sad and locked away, as if in a golden prison.



Then one day I made up my mind and I set off again.



There was Massoud, in my colourful T-shirt, which really suited him, holding something in his hand.



It was for me.



A tiny cat carved out of wood.



I stared at it, felt it, and hid it at the bottom of my pocket.



It wasn't a gift, it was a swap.



OUR  
INSIDE-OUTSIDE  
SECRET.



He nodded, smiled at me and left.





## THE RETURN

We left that faraway country. The war there ended a long time ago. The garden is even more beautiful now, filled with flowers, trees, fountains and birds (yes, and crows too).



Sometimes I think of Massoud, and wonder what happened to him. Did he keep the secret of inside-outside?

When I'm feeling unsure about anything, I hold his little cat tightly at the bottom of my pocket. I think of Massoud and then I'm brave enough to breach walls. Because there are so many walls, everywhere in life.



There are insides where we feel safe and outsides that make us feel frightened, there are walls and there are cats, as brave as you, and him, and me, leaping from one side to the other.

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