

A Note from DANA NAYERI



PHOTO BY ANNA LEADER

As a child, I became a refugee. I lived in a camp. Along with other children, I waited to be accepted to a new country. Years later, long after I had become an American, after I had fixed my strange accent and improved my English reading and learned all the cultural touchpoints, I still thought about this fretful, liminal time in my life. As I grew into adulthood, I always wondered about the next batch of children being kept in the Waiting Place, and the one after that, and the one after that. After a while, I was old enough to be their mother.

In 2018, I asked photographer Anna Bosch Miralpeix to accompany me to Katsikas camp outside Ioannina, Greece. I chose Anna because her photos made familiar things seem eerie and new: with her lens, she brought out the darkness hidden in moments of celebration and the absurd in the most frightful scenes. I had visited this camp before. I knew some of the people. Anna and I rented a little house together near the camp. Each morning one of us made coffee and toast. We filled our pockets with candy for the children. Then we set off, me with my notebook, she with her camera and tripod. Katsikas was full of refugees who had landed in the hellish Moria camp on Lesbos island and who had been brought inland to live in this field of shipping crates. Because the most urgent dangers had passed, they succumbed to the darkness of the waiting. Some have been there for years, watching their children lose their magic and curiosity, watching them fall behind in school, grow lazy and bored, forget their hobbies and their sports. It is a tragedy to watch your children's potential slip away.

Anna and I craved to see these brave little people fighting back against the Waiting Place—the monster that wants to get inside you, to change you, to make you dull. I wanted to play with them, to enter their imagined worlds, to see the landscape inside their minds. It was an education. But it was also a return to a formative time, to a story that made me who I am.

I hope that when you read this book you will feel the urgency of the unseen war for the imaginations of these brave little people. I hope you give your children the gift of *The Waiting Place* and talk to them about how they might soon welcome these same children into their schools and communities and how, in the meantime, they can help these kids continue fighting.



CANDLEWICK PRESS
www.candlewick.com