



DALIA SOFER BY REBECCA WALLWORK

AS A CHILD SHE FLED HER HOMETLAND. AS AN ADULT SHE RETURNS—IN THE PAGES OF A DEBUT NOVEL

It's been 25 years since a 10-year-old Dalia Sofer fled Iran. Despite that absence the pages of her debut novel, this month's *The Septembers of Shiraz* (Ecco), radiate with rich, evocative, often painful details of her homeland. To conjure the memories, Sofer relied on research, family history, and a little help from other artists. "I looked at a lot of photos by Abbas," she says.

Sofer's father—like Isaac Amin, her book's main character—spent time in a Tehran prison while his family was left with no idea of his whereabouts or even whether he was alive or dead. *The Septembers of Shiraz* takes us inside not just Isaac's skin, but that of his wife and two children.

The novel may have a political backdrop, but it is the intimate life of the Amin family that takes center stage. "What interests me are relationships," says Sofer. "Whatever time and place you're living in is going to influence your choices and how you relate to the people you love."

Immediately after leaving Iran, Sofer and her family (she has two brothers and one sister) spent time in Israel before ultimately settling in New York City. It was as a college student that she began to write, and she went on to earn her MFA at Sarah Lawrence. "Writing," she says, "gives me an illusion of control, because I'm creating a universe." That's particularly poignant given Sofer's admis-

sion that, though she yearns to return to her country, she fears she never will. "I'm very conflicted about it, and it gives me a lot of pain. I still haven't found a home, and I don't know if I ever will—but I'm looking."

Rebecca Wallwork is a New York City-based writer. Above: Dalia Sofer wears a shirt by CHANEL. Jeans by PORTS 1961. Shoes by MIU MIU. Bracelet by JOAN HORNIG. Cosmetics by MAYBELLINE. Hair products by JOICO. Styling: ELLE WERLIN. Hair and makeup: JUSTIN ST. CLAIR/Aartist Loft. Fashion details page 151. Photo: DANIELLE ST. LAURENT.