FOREWORD BY JOSEPH COELHO

Words FROM War

A COLLECTION OF POETRY ABOUT CONFLICT



FLORA DELARGY

For Tom. ~ F.D.

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FOREWORD

JOSEPH COELHO

Archaeologists have discovered evidence of conflict going back ten thousand years or more. Unfortunately, we are all too aware of how much war continues to be a part of people's daily lives.

Poetry has often been written at times of war, and it is, I believe, the medium best suited to deal with the onslaught of emotions that war brings forth. Poetry is also capable of harshly placing readers squarely in the shoes of another, whether that is the boots of a soldier or the bare feet of a fleeing family. It is because of this that I think poetry has the power to change things, to build our empathy until we all realise the never tired statement that, in war, there are no winners.





It is my hope that through these poems you will see first hand the impact of wars and their futility both past and present. I hope that these poems will move you to a shared dream of a future where war is never seen as an option because through Homer you will remember the heartache of lost friendships, and through Dunbar the sacrifices made by communities, and through Yusuf the injustices that wars breed, and through Kerech the cultures that wars destroy. Naturally, there are difficult topics covered through these poems – war is, after all, a bloody affair that rips at the heart. But there is also bravery and resilience and inspiration in these verses. There are poems by children who found their voice through poetry, and poems of beauty written in confinement in the darkest of situations. The human spirit never fails to strive forward, never fails to shine, and you will see it at its most vivid within these pages.

So often, talk of war leads to a feeling of hopelessness, but when I talk to young people, I am forever left hopeful. Each generation by definition does things differently, and rails against what has gone before. When I meet with young people, I see bright, wise minds that feel deeply, know their own hearts and care about the hearts of others. That's why I am hopeful that you, dear reader, will help build a future where war is no longer part of the human experience. Where instead, it is poetry that provides our only needed remembrance of what war has previously wrought.





THE ILIAD

HOMER

Extract from* the Iliad*, Book 24 – The end of the Trojan War

The games were over now. The gathered armies scattered,
each man to his fast ship, and fighters turned their minds
to thoughts of food and the sweet, warm grip of sleep.
But Achilles kept on grieving for his friend,
the memory burning on . . .
and all-subduing sleep could not take him,
not now, he turned and twisted, side to side,
he longed for Patroclus' manhood, his gallant heart—
What rough campaigns they'd fought to an end together,
what hardships they had suffered, cleaving their way
through wars of men and pounding waves at sea.
The memories flooded over him, live tears flowing,
and now he'd lie on his side, now flat on his back,

now face down again. At last, he'd leap to his feet,
wander in anguish, aimless along the surf, and dawn on dawn
flaming over the sea and shore would find him pacing.
Then he'd yoke his racing team, to the chariot-harness,
lash the corpse of Hector behind the car for dragging
and haul him three times round the dead Patroclus' tomb,
and then he'd rest again in his tents and leave the body
sprawled face down in the dust. But Apollo pitied Hector—
dead man though he was—and warded all corruption off
from Hector's corpse and round him, head to foot,
the great god wrapped the golden shield of storm,
so his skin would never rip as Achilles dragged him on.



Late eighth or early seventh century BCE

